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Macdonald, George

THE

GIFTS OF THE CHILD CHRIST,

AND OTHER TALES.

BY

GEORGE MAC DONALD.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
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THE GIFTS OF THE CHILD CHRIST.

THE GIFTS OF THE CHILD CHRIST.

CHAPTER I.

"My hearers, we grow old," said the preacher. "Be it summer or be it spring with us now, autumn will soon settle down into winter, that winter whose snow melts only in the grave. The wind of the world sets for the tomb. Some of us rejoice to be swept along on its swift wings, and hear it bellowing in the hollows of earth and sky; but it will grow a terror to the man of trembling limb and withered brain, until at length he will long for the shelter of the tomb to escape its roaring and buffeting. Happy the man who shall then be able to believe that old age itself, with its pitiable decays and sad dreams

of youth, is the chastening of the Lord, a sure sign of his love and his fatherhood."

It was the first Sunday in Advent; but "the chastening of the Lord" came into almost every sermon that man preached.

"Eloquent! But after all, *can* this kind of thing be true?" said to himself a man of about thirty, who sat decorously listening. For many years he had thought he believed this kind of thing—but of late he was not so sure.

Beside him sat his wife, in her new winter bonnet, her pretty face turned up toward the preacher; but her eyes—nothing else—revealed that she was not listening. She was much younger than her husband — hardly twenty, indeed.

In the upper corner of the pew sat a pale-faced child about five, sucking her thumb, and staring at the preacher.

The sermon over, they walked home in proximity. The husband looked gloomy, and

his eyes sought the ground. The wife looked more smiling than cheerful, and her pretty eyes went hither and thither. Behind them walked the child — steadily, "with level-fronting eyelids."

It was a late-built region of large, commonplace houses, and at one of them they stopped and entered. The door of the dining-room was open, showing the table laid for their Sunday dinner. The gentleman passed on to the library behind it, the lady went up to her bedroom, and the child a stage higher to the nursery.

It wanted half an hour to dinner. Mr. Greatorex sat down, drummed with his fingers on the arm of his easy-chair, took up a book of arctic exploration, threw it again on the table, got up, and went to the smoking-room. He had built it for his wife's sake, but was often glad of it for his own. Again he seated himself, took a cigar, and smoked gloomily.

Having reached her bedroom, Mrs. Greatorex took off her bonnet, and stood for ten minutes turning it round and round. Earnestly she regarded it—now gave a twist to the wire-stem of a flower, then spread wider the loop of a bow. She was meditating what it lacked of perfection rather than brooding over its merits: she was keen in bonnets.

Little Sophy—or, as she called herself by a transposition of consonant sounds common with children, Phosy—found her nurse Alice in the nursery. But she was lost in the pages of a certain London weekly, which had found her in a mood open to its influences, and did not even look up when the child entered. With some effort Phosy drew off her gloves, and with more difficulty untied her hat. Then she took off her jacket, smoothed her hair, and retreated to a corner. There a large shabby doll lay upon her little chair: she took it up, disposed it gently upon

the bed, seated herself in its place, got a little book from where she had left it under the chair, smoothed down her skirts, and began simultaneously to read and suck her thumb. The book was an unhealthy one, a cup filled to the brim with a poverty-stricken and selfish religion: such are always breaking out like an eruption here and there over the body of the Church, doing their part, doubtless, in carrying off the evil humours generated by poverty of blood, or the congestion of self-preservation. It is wonderful out of what spoiled fruit some children will suck sweetness.

But she did not read far: her thoughts went back to a phrase which had haunted her ever since first she went to church: "Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth."

"I wish he would chasten me," she thought for the hundredth time.

The small Christian had no suspicion that her whole life had been a period of chasten-

ing—that few children indeed had to live in such a sunless atmosphere as hers.

Alice threw down the newspaper, gazed from the window into the back-yard of the next house, saw nothing but an elderly man-servant brushing a garment, and turned upon Sophy.

"Why don't you hang up your jacket, miss?" she said, sharply.

The little one rose, opened the wardrobe-door wide, carried a chair to it, fetched her jacket from the bed, clambered up on the chair, and, leaning far forward to reach a peg, tumbled right into the bottom of the wardrobe.

"You clumsy!" exclaimed the nurse angrily, and pulling her out by the arm, shook her.

Alice was not generally rough to her, but there were reasons to-day.

Phosy crept back to her seat, pale, frightened, and a little hurt. Alice hung up the

jacket, closed the wardrobe, and, turning, contemplated her own pretty face and neat figure in the glass opposite. The dinner-bell rang.

"There, I declare!" she cried, and wheeled round on Phosy. "And your hair not brushed yet, miss! Will you ever learn to do a thing without being told it? Thank goodness, I shan't be plagued with you long! But I pity her as comes after me: I do!"

"If the Lord would but chasten me!" said the child to herself, as she rose and laid down her book with a sigh.

The maid seized her roughly by the arm, and brushed her hair with an angry haste that made the child's eyes water, and herself feel a little ashamed at the sight of them.

"How could anybody love such a troublesome chit?" she said, seeking the comfort of justification from the child herself.

Another sigh was the poor little damsel's

only answer. She looked very white and solemn as she entered the dining-room.

Mr. Greatorex was a merchant in the City. But he was more of a man than a merchant, which all merchants are not. Also, he was more scrupulous in his dealings than some merchants in the same line of business, who yet stood as well with the world as he; but, on the other hand, he had the meanness to pride himself upon it as if it had been something he might have done without and yet held up his head.

Some six years before, he had married to please his parents; and a year before, he had married to please himself. His first wife had intellect, education, and heart, but little individuality—not enough to reflect the individuality of her husband. The consequence was, he found her uninteresting. He was kind and indulgent however, and not even her best friend blamed him much for manifesting nothing beyond the average devotion

of husbands. But in truth his wife had great capabilities, only they had never ripened, and when she died, a fortnight after giving birth to Sophy, her husband had not a suspicion of the large amount of undeveloped power that had passed away with her.

Her child was so like her both in countenance and manner that he was too constantly reminded of her unlamented mother; and he loved neither enough to discover that, in a sense as true as marvellous, the child was the very flower-bud of her mother's nature, in which her retarded blossom had yet a chance of being slowly carried to perfection. Love alone gives insight, and the father took her merely for a miniature edition of the volume which he seemed to have laid aside for ever in the dust of the earth's lumber-room. Instead, therefore, of watering the roots of his little human slip from the well of his affections, he had scarcely as yet perceived more in relation to her than that he

was legally accountable for her existence, and bound to give her shelter and food. If he had questioned himself on the matter, he would have replied that love was not wanting, only waiting upon her growth, and the development of something to interest him.

Little right as he had had to expect anything from his first marriage, he had yet cherished some hopes therein — tolerably vague, it is true, yet hardly faint enough, it would seem, for he was disappointed in them. When its bonds fell from him, however, he flattered himself that he had not worn them in vain, but had through them arrived at a knowledge of women as rare as profound. But whatever the reach of this knowledge, it was not sufficient to prevent him from harbouring the presumptuous hope of so choosing and so fashioning the heart and mind of a woman that they should be as concave mirrors to his own. I do not mean that he would have admitted the figure,

but such was really the end he blindly sought. I wonder how many of those who have been disappointed in such an attempt have been thereby aroused to the perception of what a frightful failure their success would have been on both sides. It was bad enough that Augustus Greatorex's theories had cramped his own development; it would have been ten-fold worse had they been operative to the stunting of another soul.

Letty Merewether was the daughter of a bishop *in partibus*. She had been born tolerably innocent, had grown up more than tolerably pretty, and was, when she came to England at the age of sixteen, as nearly a genuine example of Locke's sheet of white paper as could well have fallen to the hand of such an experimenter as Greatorex would fain become.

In his suit he had prospered—perhaps too easily. He loved the girl, or at least loved the modified reflection of her in his own

mind; while she, thoroughly admiring the dignity, good looks, and accomplishments of the man whose attentions flattered her self-opinion, accorded him deference enough to encourage his vainest hopes. Although she knew little, fluttering over the merest surfaces of existence, she had sense enough to know that he talked sense to her, and foolishness enough to put it down to her own credit, while for the sense itself she cared little or nothing. And Greatorex, without even knowing what she was rough-hewn for, would take upon him to shape her ends!—an ambition the Divinity never permits to succeed: he who fancies himself the carver finds himself but the chisel, or indeed perhaps only the mallet, in the hand of the true workman.

During the days of his courtship, then, Letty listened and smiled, or answered with what he took for a spiritual response, when it was merely a brain-echo. Looking down

into the pond of her being, whose surface was not yet ruffled by any bubbling of springs from below, he saw the reflection of himself and was satisfied. An able man on his hobby looks a centaur of wisdom and folly; but if he be at all a wise man, the beast will one day or other show him the jade's favour of unseating him. Meantime Augustus Greatorex was fooled, not by poor little Letty, who was not capable of fooling him, but by himself. Letty had made no pretences; had been interested, and had shown her interest; had understood, or seemed to understand, what he said to her, and forgotten it the next moment—had no pocket to put it in, did not know what to do with it, and let it drop into the Limbo of Vanity. They had not been married many days before the scouts of advancing disappointment were upon them. Augustus resisted manfully for a time. But the truth was each of the two had to become a great

deal more than either was, before any approach to unity was possible. He tried to interest her in one subject after another—tried her first, I am ashamed to say, with political economy. In that instance, when he came home to dinner he found that she had not got beyond the first page of the book he had left with her. But she had the best of excuses, namely, that of that page she had not understood a sentence. He saw his mistake, and tried her with poetry. But Milton, with whom unfortunately he commenced his approaches, was to her, if not equally unintelligible, equally uninteresting. He tried her next with the elements of science, but with no better success. He returned to poetry, and read some of the Faerie Queene with her: she was, or seemed to be, interested in all his talk about it, and inclined to go on with it in his absence, but found the first stanza she tried more than enough without him to give life to it. She could give it

none, and therefore it gave her none. I believe she read a chapter of the Bible every day, but the only books she read with any real interest were novels of a sort that Augustus despised. It never occurred to him that he ought at once to have made friends of this Momus of unrighteousness, for by them he might have found entrance to the sealed chamber. He ought to have read with her the books she did like, for by them only could he make her think, and from them alone could he lead her to better. It is but from the very step upon which one stands that one can move to the next. Besides these books, there was nothing in her scheme of the universe but fashion, dress, calls, the park, other-peopledom, concerts, plays, church-going—whatever could show itself on the frosted glass of her *camera obscura*—make an interest of motion and colour in her darkened chamber. Without these, her bosom's mistress would have found life unendurable, for

not yet had she ascended her throne, but lay on the floor of her nursery, surrounded with toys that imitated life.

It was no wonder, therefore, that Augustus was at length compelled to allow himself disappointed. That it was the fault of his self-confidence made the thing no whit better. He was too much of a man not to cherish a certain tenderness for her, but he soon found to his dismay that it had begun to be mingled with a shadow of contempt. Against this he struggled, but with fluctuating success. He stopped later and later at business, and when he came home spent more and more of his time in the smoking-room, where by and by he had bookshelves put up. Occasionally he would accept an invitation to dinner and accompany his wife, but he detested evening parties, and when Letty, who never refused an invitation if she could help it, went to one, he remained at home with his books. But his power of reading

began to diminish. He became restless and irritable. Something kept gnawing at his heart. There was a sore spot in it. The spot grew larger and larger, and by degrees the centre of his consciousness came to be a soreness: his cherished idea had been fooled; he had taken a silly girl for a woman of undeveloped wealth;—a bubble, a surface whereon fair colours chased each other, for a hearted crystal.

On her part, Letty too had her grief, which, unlike Augustus, she did not keep to herself, receiving in return from more than one of her friends the soothing assurance that Augustus was only like all other men; that women were but their toys, which they cast away when weary of them. Letty did not see that she was herself making a toy of her life, or that Augustus was right in refusing to play with such a costly and delicate thing. Neither did Augustus see that, having, by his own blunder, married a mere child, he

was bound to deal with her as one, and not let the child suffer for his fault more than what could not be helped. It is not by pressing our insights upon them, but by bathing the sealed eyelids of the human kittens, that we can help them.

And all the time poor little Phosy was left to the care of Alice, a clever, careless, good-hearted, self-satisfied damsel, who, although seldom so rough in her behaviour as we have just seen her, abandoned the child almost entirely to her own resources. It was often she sat alone in the nursery, wishing the Lord would chasten her—because then he would love her.

The first course was nearly over ere Augustus had brought himself to ask—

"What did you think of the sermon to-day, Letty?"

"Not much," answered Letty. "I am not fond of finery. I prefer simplicity."

Augustus held his peace bitterly. For it

was just finery in a sermon, without knowing it, that Letty was fond of: what seemed to him a flimsy syllabub of sacred things, beaten up with the whisk of composition, was charming to Letty; while, on the contrary, if a man such as they had been listening to was carried away by the thoughts that struggled in him for utterance, the result, to her judgment, was finery, and the object display. In excuse it must be remembered that she had been used to her father's style, which no one could have aspersed with lack of sobriety.

Presently she spoke again.

"Gus, dear, couldn't you make up your mind for once to go with me to Lady Ashdaile's to-morrow? I am getting quite ashamed of appearing so often without you."

"There is another way of avoiding that unpleasantness," remarked her husband drily.

"You cruel creature!" returned Letty playfully. "But I must go this once, for I promised Mrs. Holden."

"You know, Letty," said her husband, after a little pause, "it gets of more and more consequence that you should not fatigue yourself. By keeping such late hours in such stifling rooms you are endangering two lives—remember that, Letty. If you stay at home to-morrow, I will come home early, and read to you all the evening."

"Gussy, that *would* be charming. You *know* there is nothing in the world I should enjoy so much. But this time I really mustn't."

She launched into a list of all the great nobodies and small somebodies who were to be there, and whom she positively must see: it might be her only chance.

Those last words quenched a sarcasm on Augustus' lips. He was kinder than usual the rest of the evening, and read her to sleep with the Pilgrim's Progress.

Phosy sat in a corner, listened, and understood. Or where she misunderstood, it was

an honest misunderstanding, which never does much hurt. Neither father nor mother spoke to her till they bade her good night. Neither saw the hungry heart under the mask of the still face. The father never imagined her already fit for the modelling she was better without, and the stepmother had to become a mother before she could value her.

Phosy went to bed to dream of the Valley of Humiliation.

CHAPTER II.

THE next morning Alice gave her mistress warning. It was quite unexpected, and she looked at her aghast.

"Alice," she said at length, "you're never going to leave me at such a time!"

"I'm sorry it don't suit you, ma'am, but I must."

"Why, Alice? What is the matter? Has Sophy been troublesome?"

"No, ma'am; there's no harm in that child."

"Then what can it be, Alice? Perhaps you are going to be married sooner than you expected?"

Alice gave her chin a little toss, pressed her lips together, and was silent.

"I have always been kind to you," resumed her mistress.

"I'm sure, ma'am, I never made no complaints!" returned Alice, but as she spoke she drew herself up straighter than before.

"Then what is it?" said her mistress.

"The fact is, ma'am," answered the girl, almost fiercely, "I can*not* any longer endure a state of domestic slavery."

"I don't understand you a bit better," said Mrs. Greatorex, trying, but in vain, to smile, and therefore looking angrier than she was.

"I mean, ma'am—an' I see no reason as I shouldn't say it, for it's the truth—there's a worm at the root of society where one yuman bein' 's got to do the dirty work of another. I don't mind sweepin' up my own dust, but I won't sweep up nobody else's. I ain't a goin' to demean myself no longer! There!"

"Leave the room, Alice," said Mrs. Greatorex; and when, with a toss and a flounce,

the young woman had vanished, she burst into tears of anger and annoyance.

The day passed. The evening came. She dressed without Alice's usual help, and went to Lady Ashdaile's with her friend. There a reaction took place, and her spirits rose unnaturally. She even danced—to the disgust of one or two quick-eyed matrons who sat by the wall.

When she came home she found her husband sitting up for her. He said next to nothing, and sat up an hour longer with his book.

In the night she was taken ill. Her husband called Alice, and ran himself to fetch the doctor. For some hours she seemed in danger, but by noon was much better. Only the greatest care was necessary.

As soon as she could speak, she told Augustus of Alice's warning, and he sent for her to the library.

She stood before him with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes.

"I understand, Alice, you have given your mistress warning," he said gently.

"Yes, sir."

"Your mistress is very ill, Alice."

"Yes, sir."

"Don't you think it would be ungrateful of you to leave her in her present condition? She's not likely to be strong for some time to come."

The use of the word "ungrateful" was an unfortunate one. Alice begged to know what she had to be grateful for. Was her work worth nothing? And her master, as every one must who claims that which can only be freely given, found himself in the wrong.

"Well, Alice," he said, "we won't dispute that point; and if you are really determined on going, you must do the best you can for your mistress for the rest of the month."

Alice's sense of injury was soothed by her master's forbearance. She had always rather

approved of Mr. Greatorex, and she left the room more softly than she had entered it.

Letty had a fortnight in bed, during which she reflected a little.

The very day on which she left her room, Alice sought an interview with her master, and declared she could not stay out her month; she must go home at once.

She had been very attentive to her mistress during the fortnight: there must be something to account for her strange behaviour.

"Come now, Alice," said her master, "what's at the back of all this? You have been a good, well-behaved, obliging girl till now, and I am certain you would never be like this if there weren't something wrong somewhere."

"Something wrong, sir! No, indeed, sir! Except you call it wrong to have an old uncle as dies and leaves ever so much money —thousands on thousands, the lawyers say."

"And does it come to you then, Alice?"

"I get my share, sir. He left it to be parted even between his nephews and nieces."

"Why, Alice, you are quite an heiress, then!" returned her master, scarcely however believing the thing so grand as Alice would have it. "But don't you think now it would be rather hard that your fortune should be Mrs. Greatorex's misfortune?"

"Well, I don't see as how it shouldn't," replied Alice. "It's mis'ess's fortun' as 'as been my misfortun'—ain't it now, sir? An' why shouldn't it be the other way next?"

"I don't quite see how your mistress's fortune can be said to be your misfortune, Alice."

"Anybody would see that, sir, as wasn't blinded by class-prejudices."

"Class-prejudices!" exclaimed Mr. Greatorex, in surprise at the word.

"It's a term they use, I believe, sir! But it's plain enough that if mis'ess hadn't 'a'

been better off than me, she wouldn't ha' been able to secure my services—as you calls it."

"That is certainly plain enough," returned Mr. Greatorex. "But suppose nobody had been able to secure your services, what would have become of you?"

"By that time the people'd have rose to assert their rights."

"To what?—To fortunes like yours?"

"To bread and cheese at least, sir," returned Alice, pertly.

"Well, but you've had something better than bread and cheese."

"I don't make no complaints as to the style of livin' in the house, sir, but that's all one, so long as it's on the vile condition of domestic slavery—which it's nothing can justify."

"Then of course, although you are now a woman of property, you will never dream of having any one to wait on you," said her

master, amused with the volume of human nature thus opened to him.

"All I say, sir, is—it's my turn now; and I ain't goin' to be sit upon by no one. I know my dooty to myself."

"I didn't know there was such a duty, Alice," said her master.

Something in his tone displeased her.

"Then you know now, sir," she said, and bounced out of the room.

The next moment, however, ashamed of her rudeness, she re-entered, saying,

"I don't want to be unkind, sir, but I must go home. I've got a brother that's ill, too, and wants to see me. If you don't object to me goin' home for a month, I promise you to come back and see mis'ess through her trouble —as a friend, you know, sir."

"But just listen to me first, Alice," said Mr. Greatorex. "I've had something to do with wills in my time, and I can assure you it is not likely to be less than a year before

you can touch the money. You had much better stay where you are till your uncle's affairs are settled. You don't know what may happen. There's many a slip between cup and lip, you know."

"Oh! it's all right, sir. Everybody knows the money's left to his nephews and nieces, and me and my brother's as good as any."

"I don't doubt it: still, if you'll take my advice, you'll keep a sound roof over your head till another's ready for you."

Alice only threw her chin in the air, and said almost threateningly,

"Am I to go for the month, sir?"

"I'll talk to your mistress about it," answered Mr. Greatorex, not at all sure that such an arrangement would be for his wife's comfort.

But the next day Mrs. Greatorex had a long talk with Alice, and the result was that on the following Monday she was to go home for a month, and then return for two months

more at least. What Mr. Greatorex had said about the legacy, had had its effect, and, besides, her mistress had spoken to her with pleasure in her good fortune. About Sophy no one felt any anxiety: she was no trouble to any one, and the housemaid would see to her.

CHAPTER III.

On the Sunday evening, Alice's lover, having heard, not from herself, but by a side wind, that she was going home the next day, made his appearance in Wimborne Square, somewhat perplexed—both at the move, and at her leaving him in ignorance of the same. He was a cabinet-maker in an honest shop in the neighbourhood, and in education, faculty, and general worth, considerably Alice's superior—a fact which had hitherto rather pleased her, but now gave zest to the change which she imagined had subverted their former relation. Full of the sense of her new superiority, she met him draped in an indescribable strangeness. John Jephson felt,

at the very first word, as if her voice came from the other side of the English Channel. He wondered what he had done, or rather what Alice could imagine he had done or said, to put her in such tantrums.

"Alice, my dear," he said—for John was a man to go straight at the enemy, "what's amiss? What's come over you? You ain't altogether like your own self to-night! And here I find you're goin' away, and ne'er a word to me about it! What have I done?"

Alice's chin alone made reply. She waited the fitting moment, with splendour to astonish, and with grandeur to subdue her lover. To tell the sad truth, she was no longer sure that it would be well to encourage him on the old footing; was she not standing on tiptoe, her skirts in her hand, on the brink of the brook that parted serfdom from gentility, on the point of stepping daintily across, and leaving domestic slavery, red hands, caps, and obedience behind her? How

then was she to marry a man that had black nails, and smelt of glue? It was incumbent on her at least, for propriety's sake, to render him at once aware that it was in condescension ineffable she took any notice of him.

"Alice, my girl!" began John again, in expostulatory tone.

"Miss Cox, if you please, John Jephson," interposed Alice.

"What on 'arth's come over you?" exclaimed John, with the first throb of rousing indignation. "But if you ain't your own self no more, why, Miss Cox be it. 'T seems to me 's if I warn't my own self no more—'s if I'd got into some un else, or 't least hedn't got my own ears on m' own head.—Never saw or heerd Alice like this afore!" he added, turning in gloomy bewilderment to the housemaid for a word of human sympathy.

The movement did not altogether please Alice, and she felt she must justify her behaviour.

"You see, John," she said, with dignity, keeping her back towards him, and pretending to dust the globe of a lamp, "there's things as no woman can help, and therefore as no man has no right to complain of them. It's not as if I'd gone an' done it, or changed myself, no more 'n if it 'ad took place in my cradle. What can I help it, if the world goes and changes itself? Am *I* to blame?—tell me that. It's not that I make no complaint, but I tell you it ain't me, it's circumstances as is gone and changed theirselves, and bein' as circumstances is changed, things ain't the same as they was, and Miss is the properer term from you to me, John Jephson."

"Dang it if I know what you're a drivin' at, Alice!—Miss Cox!—and I beg yer pardon, miss, I'm sure.—Dang me if I do!"

"Don't swear, John Jephson—leastways before a lady. It's not proper."

"It seems to me, Miss Cox, as if the wind was a settin' from Bedlam, or may be Colney

Hatch," said John, who was considered a humourist among his comrades. "I wouldn't take no liberties with a lady, Miss Cox; but if I might be so bold as to arst the joke of the thing——"

"Joke, indeed!" cried Alice. "Do you call a dead uncle and ten thousand pounds a joke?"

"God bless me!" said John. "You don't mean it, Alice?"

"I do mean it, and that you'll find, John Jephson. I'm goin' to bid you good-bye to-morrer."

"Whoy, Alice!" exclaimed honest John, aghast.

"It's truth I tell ye," said Alice.

"And for how long?" gasped John, fore-feeling illimitable misfortune.

"That depends," returned Alice, who did not care to lessen the effect of her communication by mentioning her promised return for a season. "—It ain't likely," she added, "as

a heiress is a goin' to act the nuss-maid much longer."

"But Alice," said John, "you don't mean to say—it's not in your mind now—it can't be, Alice—you're only jokin' with me——"

"Indeed, and I'm not!" interjected Alice, with a sniff.

"I don't mean that way, you know. What I mean is, you don't mean as how this 'ere money—dang it all!—as how it's to be all over between you and me?—You *can't* mean that, Alice!" ended the poor fellow, with a choking in his throat.

It was very hard upon him! He must either look as if he wanted to share her money, or else as if he were ready to give her up.

"Arst yourself, John Jephson," answered Alice, "whether it's likely a young lady of fortun' would be keepin' company with a young man as didn't know how to take off his hat to her in the park?"

Alice did not above half mean what she said: she wished mainly to enhance her own importance. At the same time she did mean it half, and that would have been enough for Jephson. He rose, grievously wounded.

"Good-bye, Alice," he said, taking the hand she did not refuse. "Ye're throwin' from ye what all yer money won't buy."

She gave a scornful little laugh, and John walked out of the kitchen.

At the door he turned with one lingering look; but in Alice there was no sign of softening. She turned scornfully away, and no doubt enjoyed her triumph to the full.

The next morning she went away.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. GREATOREX had ceased to regard the advent of Christmas with much interest. Naturally gifted with a strong religious tendency, he had, since his first marriage, taken, not to denial, but to the side of objection, spending much energy in contempt for the foolish opinions of others, a self-indulgence which does less than little to further the growth of one's own spirit in truth and righteousness. The only person who stands excused—I do not say justified—in so doing, is the man who, having been taught the same opinions, has found them a legion of adversaries barring his way to the truth. But having got rid of them for himself, it is, I suspect, worse than useless to

attack them again, save as the ally of those who are fighting their way through the same ranks to the truth. Greatorex had been indulging his intellect at the expense of his heart. A man may have light in the brain and darkness in the heart. It were better to be an owl than a strong-eyed apteryx. He was on the path which naturally ends in blindness and unbelief. I fancy, if he had not been neglectful of his child, she would ere this time have relighted his Christmas-candles for him; but now his second disappointment in marriage had so dulled his heart that he had begun to regard life as a stupid affair, in which the most enviable fool was the man who could still expect to realize an ideal. He had set out on a false track altogether, but had not yet discovered that there had been an immoral element at work in his mistake.

For what right had he to desire the fashioning of any woman after his ideas?

did not the angel of her eternal Ideal for ever behold the face of her Father in heaven? The best that can be said for him is, that, notwithstanding his disappointment and her faults, yea, notwithstanding his own faults, which were, with all his cultivation and strength of character, yet more serious than hers, he was still kind to her; yes, I may say for him, that, notwithstanding even her silliness, which is a sickening fault, and one which no supremacy of beauty can overshadow, he still loved her a little. Hence the care he showed for her in respect of the coming sorrow was genuine; it did not all belong to his desire for a son to whom he might be a father indeed—after his own fancies, however. Letty, on her part, was as full of expectation as the girl who has been promised a doll that can shut and open its eyes, and cry when it is pinched; her carelessness of its safe arrival came of ignorance and not indifference.

It cannot but seem strange that such a man should have been so careless of the child he had. But from the first she had painfully reminded him of her mother, with whom in truth he had never quarrelled, but with whom he had not found life the less irksome on that account. Add to this that he had been growing fonder of business,—a fact which indicated, in a man of his endowment and development, an inclination downwards of the plane of his life. It was some time since he had given up reading poetry. History had almost followed: he now read little except politics, travels, and popular expositions of scientific progress.

That year Christmas Eve fell upon a Monday. The day before, Letty not feeling very well, her husband thought it better not to leave her, and gave up going to church. Phosy was utterly forgotten, but she dressed herself, and at the usual hour appeared with her prayer-book in her hand ready for church.

When her father told her that he was not going, she looked so blank that he took pity upon her, and accompanied her to the church-door, promising to meet her as she came out. Phosy sighed from relief as she entered, for she had a vague idea that by going to church to pray for it she might move the Lord to chasten her. At least he would see her there, and might think of it. She had never had such an attention from her father before, never such dignity conferred upon her as to be allowed to appear in church alone, sitting in the pew by herself like a grown damsel. But I doubt if there was any pride in her stately step, or any vanity in the smile—no, not smile, but illuminated mist, the vapour of smiles, which haunted her sweet little solemn church-window of a face, as she walked up the aisle.

The preacher was one of whom she had never heard her father speak slighting word, in whom her unbounded trust had never been

shaken. Also he was one who believed with his whole soul in the things that make Christmas precious. To him the birth of the wonderful baby hinted at hundreds of strange things in the economy of the planet. That a man could so thoroughly persuade himself that he believed the old fable, was matter of marvel to some of his friends who held blind Nature the eternal mother, and Night the everlasting grandmother of all things. But the child Phosy, in her dreams or out of them, in church or nursery, with her book or her doll, was never out of the region of wonders, and would have believed, or tried to believe, anything that did not involve a moral impossibility.

What the preacher said I need not even partially repeat; it is enough to mention a certain metamorphosed deposit from the stream of his eloquence carried home in her mind by Phosy: from some of his sayings about the birth of Jesus into the world, into

the family, into the individual human bosom, she had got it into her head that Christmas Day was not a birthday like that she had herself last year, but that, in some wonderful way, to her requiring no explanation, the baby Jesus was born every Christmas Day afresh. What became of him afterwards she did not know, and indeed she had never yet thought to ask how it was that he could come to every house in London as well as No. 1, Wimborne Square. Little of a home as another might think it, that house was yet to her the centre of all houses, and the wonder had not yet widened rippling beyond it: into that spot of the pool the eternal gift would fall.

Her father forgot the time over his book, but so entranced was her heart with the expectation of the promised visit, now so near—the day after to-morrow—that, if she did not altogether forget to look for him as she stepped down the stair from the church

door to the street, his absence caused her no uneasiness; and when, just as she reached it, he opened the house-door in tardy haste to redeem his promise, she looked up at him with a solemn, smileless repose, born of spiritual tension and speechless anticipation, upon her face, and walking past him without change in the rhythm of her motion, marched stately up the stairs to the nursery. I believe the centre of her hope was that when the baby came she would beg him on her knees to ask the Lord to chasten her.

When dessert was over, her mother on the sofa in the drawing-room, and her father in an easy chair, with a bottle of his favourite wine by his side, she crept out of the room and away again to the nursery. There she reached up to her little bookshelf, and, full of the sermon as spongy mists are full of the sunlight, took thence a volume of stories from the German, the re-reading of one of which, narrating the visit of the Christ-child,

laden with gifts, to a certain household, and what he gave to each and all therein, she had, although sorely tempted, saved up until now, and sat down with it by the fire, the only light she had. When the housemaid, suddenly remembering she must put her to bed, and at the same time discovering it was a whole hour past her usual time, hurried to the nursery, she found her fast asleep in her little arm-chair, her book on her lap, and the fire self-consumed into a dark cave with a sombre glow in its deepest hollows. Dreams had doubtless come to deepen the impressions of sermon and *mährchen*, for as she slowly yielded to the hands of Polly putting her to bed, her lips, unconsciously moved of the slumbering but not sleeping spirit, more than once murmured the words *Lord loveth* and *chasteneth*. Right blessedly would I enter the dreams of such a child—revel in them, as a bee in the heavenly gulf of a cactus-flower.

CHAPTER V.

On Christmas Eve the church bells were ringing through the murky air of London, whose streets lay flaring and steaming below. The brightest of their constellations were the butchers' shops, with their shows of prize beef; around them, the eddies of the human tides were most confused and knotted. But the toy-shops were brilliant also. To Phosy they would have been the treasure-caves of the Christ-child—all mysteries, all with insides to them—boxes, and desks, and windmills, and dove-cots, and hens with chickens, and who could tell what all? In every one of those shops her eyes would have searched for the Christ-child, the giver

of all their wealth. For to her he was everywhere that night—ubiquitous as the luminous mist that brooded all over London —of which, however, she saw nothing but the glow above the mews. John Jephson was out in the middle of all the show, drifting about in it: he saw nothing that had pleasure in it, his heart was so heavy. He never thought once of the Christ-child, or even of the Christ-man, as the giver of anything. Birth is the one standing promise-hope for the race, but for poor John this Christmas held no promise. With all his humour, he was one of those people, generally dull and slow—God grant me and mine such dulness and such sloth—who having once loved, cannot cease. During the fortnight he had scarce had a moment's ease from the sting of his Alice's treatment. The honest fellow's feelings were no study to himself; he knew nothing but the pleasure and the pain of them; but I believe it was

not mainly for himself that he was sorry. Like Othello, "the pity of it" haunted him: he had taken Alice for a downright girl, about whom there was and could be no mistake; and the first hot blast of prosperity had swept her away like a hectic leaf. What were all the shops dressed out in holly and mistletoe, what were all the rushing flaming gas-jets, what the fattest of prize-pigs to John, who could never more imagine a spare-rib on the table between Alice and him of a Sunday? His imagination ran on seeing her pass in her carriage, and drop him a nod of condescension as she swept noisily by him—trudging home weary from his work to his loveless fireside. *He* didn't want her money! Honestly, he would rather have her without than with money, for he now regarded it as an enemy, seeing what evil changes it could work. "There be some devil in it, sure!" he said to himself. True, he had never found any in his week's

wages, but he did remember once finding the devil in a month's wages received in the lump.

As he was thus thinking with himself, a carriage came suddenly from a side street into the crowd, and while he stared at it, thinking Alice might be sitting inside it while he was tramping the pavement alone, she passed him on the other side on foot—was actually pushed against him: he looked round, and saw a young woman, carrying a small bag, disappearing in the crowd. "There's an air of Alice about *her*," said John to himself, seeing her back only. But of course it couldn't be Alice; for her he must look in the carriages now! And what a fool he was: every young woman reminded him of the one he had lost! Perhaps if he was to call the next day—Polly was a good-natured creature—he might hear some news of her.

It had been a troubled fortnight with Mrs. Greatorex. She wished much that she could

have talked to her husband more freely, but she had not learned to feel at home with him. Yet he had been kinder and more attentive than usual all the time, so much so that Letty thought with herself—if she gave him a boy, he would certainly return to his first devotion. She said *boy*, because any one might see he cared little for Phosy. She had never discovered that he was disappointed in herself, but, since her disregard of his wishes had brought evil upon her, she had begun to suspect that he had some ground for being dissatisfied with her. She never dreamed of his kindness as the effort of a conscientious nature to make the best of what could not now be otherwise helped. Her own poverty of spirit and lack of worth achieved, she knew as little of as she did of the riches of Michael the archangel. One must have begun to gather wisdom before he can see his own folly.

That evening she was seated alone in the

drawing-room, her husband having left her to smoke his cigar, when the butler entered and informed her that Alice had returned, but was behaving so oddly that they did not know what to do with her. Asking wherein her oddness consisted, and learning that it was mostly in silence and tears, she was not sorry to gather that some disappointment had befallen her, and felt considerable curiosity to know what it was. She therefore told him to send her upstairs.

Meantime Polly, the housemaid, seeing plainly enough from her return in the middle of her holiday, and from her utter dejection, that Alice's expectations had been frustrated, and cherishing no little resentment against her because of her *uppishness* on the first news of her good fortune, had been ungenerous enough to take her revenge in a way as stinging in effect as bitter in intention; for she loudly protested that no amount of such luck as she pretended to

suppose in Alice's possession, would have induced *her* to behave herself so that a handsome honest fellow like John Jephson should be driven to despise her, and take up with her betters. When her mistress's message came, Alice was only too glad to find refuge from the kitchen in the drawing-room.

The moment she entered, she fell on her knees at the foot of the couch on which her mistress lay, covered her face with her hands, and sobbed grievously.

Nor was the change more remarkable in her bearing than in her person. She was pale and worn, and had a hunted look—was in fact a mere shadow of what she had been. For a time her mistress found it impossible to quiet her so as to draw from her her story: tears and sobs combined with repugnance to hold her silent.

"Oh, ma'am!" she burst out at length, wringing her hands, "how ever *can* I tell you? You will never speak to me again.

Little did I think such a disgrace was waiting me!"

"It was no fault of yours if you were misinformed," said her mistress, "or that your uncle was not the rich man you fancied."

"Oh, ma'am, there was no mistake there! He was more than twice as rich as I fancied. If he had only died a beggar, and left things as they was!"

"Then he didn't leave it to his nephews and nieces as they told you?—Well, there's no disgrace in that."

"Oh! but he did, ma'am: that was all right; no mistake there either, ma'am.—And to think o' me behavin' as I did—to you and master as was so good to me! Who'll ever take any more notice of me now, after what has come out—as I'm sure I no more dreamed on than the child unborn!"

An agonized burst of fresh weeping followed, and it was with prolonged difficulty, and by incessant questioning, that Mrs.

Greatorex at length drew from her the following facts.

Before Alice and her brother could receive the legacy to which they laid claim, it was necessary to produce certain documents, the absence of which, as of any proof to take their place, led to the unavoidable publication of a fact previously known only to a living few—namely, that the father and mother of Alice Hopwood had never been married, which fact deprived them of the smallest claim on the legaey, and fell like a millstone upon Alice and her pride. From the height of her miserable arrogance she fell prone—not merely hurled back into the lowly condition from which she had raised her head only to despise it with base unrighteousness, and to adopt and reassert the principles she had abhorred when they affected herself—not merely this, but, in her own judgment at least, no longer the respectable member of society she had hitherto been justified in

supposing herself. The relation of her father and mother she felt overshadow her with a disgrace unfathomable — the more overwhelming that it cast her from the gates of the Paradise she had seemed on the point of entering: her fall she measured by the height of the social ambition she had cherished, and had seemed on the point of attaining. But it is not an evil that the devil's money, which this legacy had from the first proved to Alice, should turn to a hot cinder in the hand. Rarely had a more haughty spirit than hers gone before a fall, and rarely has the fall been more sudden or more abject. And the consciousness of the behaviour into which her false riches had seduced her, changed the whip of her chastisement into scorpions. Worst of all, she had insulted her lover as beneath her notice, and the next moment had found herself too vile for his. Judging by herself, in the injustice of bitter humiliation she

imagined him scoffing with his mates at the base-born menial who would set up for a fine lady. But had she been more worthy of honest John, she would have understood him better. As it was, no really good fortune could have befallen her but such as now seemed to her the depth of evil fortune. Without humiliation to prepare the way for humility, she must have become capable of more and more baseness, until she lost all that makes life worth having.

When Mrs. Greatorex had given her what consolation she found handy, and at length dismissed her, the girl, unable to endure her own company, sought the nursery, where she caught Sophy in her arms and embraced her with fervour. Never in her life having been the object of any such display of feeling, Phosy was much astonished: when Alice had set her down and she had resumed her seat by the fireside, she went on staring for a while—and then a strange sort of miming ensued.

It was Phosy's habit—one less rare with children than may by most be imagined—to do what she could to enter into any state of mind whose shows were sufficiently marked for her observation. She sought to lay hold of the feeling that produced the expression: less than the reproduction of a similar condition in her own imaginative sensorium, subject to her leisurely examination, would in no case satisfy the little metaphysician. But what was indeed very odd was the means she took for arriving at the sympathetic knowledge she desired. As if she had been the most earnest student of dramatic expression through the facial muscles, she would sit watching the countenance of the object of her solicitude, all the time; with full consciousness, fashioning her own as nearly as she could into the lines and forms of the other: in proportion as she succeeded, the small psychologist imagined she felt in herself the condition that produced

the phenomenon she observed — as if the shape of her face cast inward its shadow upon her mind, and so revealed to it, through the two faces, what was moving and shaping in the mind of the other.

In the present instance, having at length, after modelling and remodelling her face like that of a gutta-percha doll for some time, composed it finally into the best correspondence she could effect, she sat brooding for a while, with Alice's expression as it were frozen upon it. Gradually the forms assumed melted away, and allowed her still, solemn face to look out from behind them. The moment this evanishment was complete, she rose and went to Alice, where she sat staring into the fire, unconscious of the scrutiny she had been undergoing, and, looking up in her face, took her thumb out of her mouth, and said,

"Is the Lord chastening Alice? I wish he would chasten Phosy."

Her face was calm as that of the Sphinx; there was no mist in the depth of her gray eyes, not a cloud on the wide heaven of her forehead.

Was the child crazed? What could the atom mean, with her big eyes looking right into her? Alice never had understood her: it were indeed strange if the less should comprehend the greater! She was not yet capable of recognising the word of the Lord in the mouth of babes and sucklings. But there was a something in Phosy's face besides its calmness and unintelligibility. What it was Alice could never have told—yet it did her good. She lifted the child on her lap. There she soon fell asleep. Alice undressed her, laid her in her crib, and went to bed herself.

But, weary as she was, she had to rise again before she got to sleep. Her mistress was again taken ill. Doctor and nurse were sent for in hot haste; hansom cabs came and

went throughout the night, like noisy moths to the one lighted house in the street; there were soft steps within, and doors were gently opened and shut. The waters of Mara had risen and filled the house.

Towards morning they were ebbing slowly away. Letty did not know that her husband was watching by her bedside. The street was quiet now. So was the house. Most of its people had been up throughout the night, but now they had all gone to bed except the strange nurse and Mr. Greatorex.

It was the morning of Christmas Day, and little Phosy knew it in every cranny of her soul. She was not of those who had been up all night, and now she was awake, early and wide, and the moment she awoke she was speculating: He was coming to-day—*how* would he come? Where should she find the baby Jesus? And when would he come? In the morning, or the afternoon, or in the evening? Could such a grief be in store for

her as that he would not appear until night, when she would be again in bed? But she would not sleep till all hope was gone. Would everybody be gathered to meet him, or would he show himself to one after another, each alone? Then her turn would be last, and oh, if he would come to the nursery! But perhaps he would not appear to her at all!—for was she not one whom the Lord did not care to chasten?

Expectation grew and wrought in her until she could lie in bed no longer. Alice was fast asleep. It must be early, but whether it was yet light or not she could not tell for the curtains. Anyhow she would get up and dress, and then she would be ready for Jesus whenever he should come. True, she was not able to dress herself very well, but he would know, and would not mind. She made all the haste she could, consistently with taking pains, and was soon attired after a fashion.

She crept out of the room and down the stair. The house was very still. What if Jesus should come and find nobody awake? Would he go again and give them no presents? She couldn't expect any herself —but might he not let her take theirs for the rest? Perhaps she ought to wake them all, but she dared not without being sure.

On the last landing above the first floor, she saw, by the low gaslight at the end of the corridor, an unknown figure pass the foot of the stair: could she have anything to do with the marvel of the day? The woman looked up, and Phosy dropped the question. Yet she might be a charwoman, whose assistance the expected advent rendered necessary. When she reached the bottom of the stair she saw her disappearing in her step-mother's room. That she did not like. It was the one room into which she could not go. But, as the house was so still, she would search

everywhere else, and if she did not find him, would then sit down in the hall and wait for him.

The room next the foot of the stair, and opposite her step-mother's, was the spare room, with which she associated ideas of state and grandeur: where better could she begin than at the guest-chamber?—There! —Could it be? Yes!—Through the chink of the scarce-closed door she saw light. Either he was already there or there they were expecting him. From that moment she felt as if lifted out of the body. Far exalted above all dread, she peeped modestly in, and then entered. Beyond the foot of the bed, a candle stood on a little low table, but nobody was to be seen. There was a stool near the table: she would sit on it by the candle, and wait for him. But ere she reached it, she caught sight of something upon the bed that drew her thither. She stood entranced.—*Could* it be?—It *might* be.

Perhaps he had left it there while he went into her mamma's room with something for her.—The loveliest of dolls ever imagined! She drew nearer. The light was low, and the shadows were many: she could not be sure what it was. But when she had gone close up to it, she concluded with certainty that it was in very truth a doll—perhaps intended for her—but beyond doubt the most exquisite of dolls. She dragged a chair to the bed, got up, pushed her little arms softly under it, and drawing it gently to her, slid down with it. When she felt her feet firm on the floor, filled with the solemn composure of holy awe she carried the gift of the child Jesus to the candle, that she might the better admire its beauty and know its preciousness. But the light had no sooner fallen upon it than a strange undefinable doubt awoke within her. Whatever it was, it was the very essence of loveliness—the tiny darling with its alabaster face, and its delicately

modelled hands and fingers! A long night-gown covered all the rest.—Was it possible? —Could it be?—Yes, indeed! it must be—it could be nothing else than a *real* baby! What a goose she had been! Of course it was baby Jesus himself!—for was not this his very own Christmas Day on which he was always born?—If she had felt awe of his gift before, what a grandeur of adoring love, what a divine dignity possessed her, holding in her arms the very child himself! One shudder of bliss passed through her, and in an agony of possession she clasped the baby to her great heart—then at once became still with the satisfaction of eternity, with the peace of God. She sat down on the stool, near the little table, with her back to the candle, that its rays should not fall on the eyes of the sleeping Jesus and wake him: there she sat, lost in the very majesty of bliss, at once the mother and the slave of the Lord Jesus.

She sat for a time still as marble waiting for marble to awake, heedful as tenderest woman not to rouse him before his time, though her heart was swelling with the eager petition that he would ask his Father to be as good as chasten her. And as she sat, she began, after her wont, to model her face to the likeness of his, that she might understand his stillness—the absolute peace that dwelt on his countenance. But as she did so, again a sudden doubt invaded her: Jesus lay so very still—never moved, never opened his pale eye-lids! And now set thinking, she noted that he did not breathe. She had seen babies asleep, and their breath came and went—their little bosoms heaved up and down, and sometimes they would smile, and sometimes they would moan and sigh. But Jesus did none of all these things: was it not strange? And then he was cold—oh, so cold!

A blue silk coverlid lay on the bed: she

half rose and dragged it off, and contrived to wind it around herself and the baby. Sad at heart, very sad, but undismayed, she sat and watched him on her lap.

CHAPTER VI.

MEANTIME the morning of Christmas Day grew. The light came and filled the house. The sleepers slept late, but at length they stirred. Alice awoke last—from a troubled sleep, in which the events of the night mingled with her own lost condition and destiny. After all Polly had been kind, she thought, and got Sophy up without disturbing her.

She had been but a few minutes down, when a strange and appalling rumour made itself—I cannot say audible, but—somehow known through the house, and every one hurried up in horrible dismay.

The nurse had gone into the spare room,

and missed the little dead thing she had laid there. The bed was between her and Phosy, and she never saw her. The doctor had been sharp with her about something the night before: she now took her revenge in suspicion of him, and after a hasty and fruitless visit of inquiry to the kitchen, hurried to Mr. Greatorex.

The servants crowded to the spare room, and when their master, incredulous indeed, yet shocked at the tidings brought him, hastened to the spot, he found them all in the room, gathered at the foot of the bed. A little sunlight filtered through the red window-curtains, and gave a strange pallid expression to the flame of the candle, which had now burned very low. At first he saw nothing but the group of servants, silent, motionless, with heads leaning forward, intently gazing: he had come just in time: another moment and they would have ruined the lovely sight. He stepped forward, and

saw Phosy, half shrouded in blue, the candle behind illuminating the hair she had found too rebellious to the brush, and making of it a faint aureole about her head and white face, whence cold and sorrow had driven all the flush, rendering it colourless as that upon her arm which had never seen the light. She had pored on the little face until she knew death, and now she sat a speechless mother of sorrow, bending in the dim light of the tomb over the body of her holy infant.

How it was I cannot tell, but the moment her father saw her she looked up, and the spell of her dumbness broke.

"Jesus is dead," she said, slowly and sadly, but with perfect calmness. "He is dead," she repeated. "He came too early, and there was no one up to take care of him, and he's dead—dead—dead!"

But as she spoke the last words, the frozen lump of agony gave way; the well of her heart suddenly filled, swelled, overflowed;

the last word was half sob, half shriek of utter despair and loss.

Alice darted forward and took the dead baby tenderly from her. The same moment her father raised the little mother and clasped her to his bosom. Her arms went round his neck, her head sank on his shoulder, and sobbing in grievous misery, yet already a little comforted, he bore her from the room.

"No, no, Phosy!" they heard him say. "Jesus is not dead, thank God. It is only your little brother that hadn't life enough, and is gone back to God for more."

Weeping the women went down the stairs. Alice's tears were still flowing, when John Jephson entered. Her own troubles forgotten in the emotion of the scene she had just witnessed, she ran to his arms and wept on his bosom.

John stood as one astonied.

"O Lord! this *is* a Christmas!" he sighed at last.

"Oh John!" cried Alice, and tore herself from his embrace, "I forgot! You'll never speak to me again, John! Don't do it, John."

And with the words she gave a stifled cry, and fell a weeping again, behind her two shielding hands.

"Why, Alice!—you ain't married, are you?" gasped John, to whom that was the only possible evil.

"No, John, and never shall be: a respectable man like you would never think of looking twice at a poor girl like me!"

"Let's have one more look anyhow," said John, drawing her hands from her face. "Tell me what's the matter, and if there's anything can be done to right you, I'll work day and night to do it, Alice."

"There's nothing *can* be done, John," replied Alice, and would again have floated out on the ocean of her misery, but in spite of wind and tide, that is sobs and tears, she

held on by the shore at his entreaty, and told her tale, not even omitting the fact that when she went to the eldest of the cousins, inheriting through the misfortune of her and her brother so much more than their expected share, and "demeaned herself" to beg a little help for her brother, who was dying of consumption, he had all but ordered her out of the house, swearing he had nothing to do with her or her brother, and saying she ought to be ashamed to show her face.

"And that when we used to make mud pies together!" concluded Alice with indignation. "There, John! you have it all," she added. "——And now?"

With the word she gave a deep, humbly questioning look into his honest eyes.

"Is that all, Alice?" he asked.

"Yes, John; ain't it enough?" she returned.

"More'n enough," answered John. "I swear to you, Alice, you're worth to me ten

times what you would ha' been, even if you'd ha' had me, with ten thousand pounds in your ridicule. Why, my woman, I never saw you look one 'alf so 'an'some as you do now!"

"But the disgrace of it, John!" said Alice, hanging her head, and so hiding the pleasure that would dawn through all the mist of her misery.

"Let your father and mother settle that betwixt 'em, Alice. 'Tain't none o' my business. Please God, we'll do different.—When shall it be, my girl?"

"When you like, John," answered Alice, without raising her head, thoughtfully.

When she had withdrawn herself from the too rigorous embrace with which he received her consent, she remarked—

"I do believe, John, money ain't a good thing! Sure as I live, with the very wind o' that money, the devil entered into me. Didn't you hate me, John? Speak the truth now."

"No, Alice. I did cry a bit over you, though. You *was* possessed like."

"I *was* possessed. I do believe if that money hadn't been took from me, I'd never ha' had you, John. Ain't it awful to think on?"

"Well, no. O' coorse! How could ye?" said Jephson—with reluctance.

"Now, John, don't ye talk like that, for I won't stand it. Don't you go for to set me up again with excusin' of me. I'm a nasty conceited cat, I am—and all for nothing but mean pride."

"Mind ye, ye're mine now, Alice; an' what's mine's mine, an' I won't have it abused. I knows you twice the woman you was afore; and all the world couldn't gi' me such another Christmas-box—no, not if it was all gold watches and roast beef."

When Mr. Greatorex returned to his wife's room, and thought to find her asleep as he had left her, he was dismayed to hear sounds

of soft weeping from the bed. Some tone or stray word, never intended to reach her ear, had been enough to reveal the truth concerning her baby.

"Hush! hush!" he said, with more love in his heart than had moved there for many months, and therefore more in his tone than she had heard for as many;—"if you cry you will be ill. Hush, my dear!"

In a moment, ere he could prevent her, she had flung her arms around his neck as he stooped over her.

"Husband! husband!" she cried, "is it my fault?"

"You behaved perfectly," he returned. "No woman could have been braver."

"Ah, but I wouldn't stay at home when you wanted me."

"Never mind that now, my child," he said.

At the word she pulled his face down to hers.

"I have *you*, and I don't care," he added.

"*Do* you care to have me?" she said, with a sob that ended in a loud cry. "Oh! I don't deserve it. But I *will* be good after this. I promise you I will."

"Then you must begin now, my darling. You must lie perfectly still, and not cry a bit, or you will go after the baby, and I shall be left alone."

She looked up at him with such a light in her face as he had never dreamed of there before. He had never seen her so lovely. Then she withdrew her arms, repressed her tears, smiled, and turned her face away. He put her hands under the clothes, and in a minute or two she was again fast asleep.

CHAPTER VII.

THAT day, when Phosy and her father had sat down to their Christmas dinner, he rose again, and taking her up as she sat, chair and all, set her down close to him, on the other side of the corner of the table. It was the first of a new covenant between them. The father's eyes having been suddenly opened to her character and preciousness, as well as to his own neglected duty in regard to her, it was as if a well of life had burst forth at his feet. And every day, as he looked in her face and talked to her, it was with more and more respect for what he found in her, with growing tenderness for her predilections, and reverence for the

divine idea enclosed in her ignorance, for her childish wisdom, and her calm seeking—until at length he would have been horrified at the thought of training her up in *his* way: had she not a way of her own to go—following—not the dead Jesus, but Him who liveth for evermore? In the endeavour to help her, he had to find his own position towards the truth; and the results were weighty.—Nor did the child's influence work forward merely. In his intercourse with her he was so often reminded of his first wife, and that with the gloss or comment of a childish reproduction, that his memories of her at length grew a little tender, and through the child he began to understand the nature and worth of the mother. In her child she had given him what she could not be herself. Unable to keep up with him, she had handed him her baby, and dropped on the path.

Nor was little Sophy his only comfort. Through their common loss and her hus-

band's tenderness, Letty began to grow a woman. And her growth was the more rapid that, himself taught through Phosy, her husband no longer desired to make her adopt his tastes, and judge with his experiences, but, as became the elder and the tried, entered into her tastes and experiences—became, as it were, a child again with her, that, through the thing she was, he might help the thing she had to be.

As soon as she was able to bear it, he told her the story of the dead Jesus, and with the tale came to her heart love for Phosy. She had lost a son for a season, but she had gained a daughter for ever.

Such were the gifts the Christ-child brought to one household that Christmas. And the days of the mourning of that household were ended.

THE HISTORY OF PHOTOGEN AND NYCTERIS.

THE HISTORY OF PHOTOGEN AND NYCTERIS.

A DAY AND NIGHT MÄHRCHEN.

CHAPTER I.

WATHO.

THERE was once a witch who desired to know everything. But the wiser a witch is, the harder she knocks her head against the wall when she comes to it. Her name was Watho, and she had a wolf in her mind. She cared for nothing in itself—only for knowing it. She was not naturally cruel, but the wolf had made her cruel.

She was tall and graceful, with a white skin, red hair, and black eyes, which had a

red fire in them. She was straight and strong, but now and then would fall bent together, shudder, and sit for a moment with her head turned over her shoulder, as if the wolf had got out of her mind on to her back.

CHAPTER II.

AURORA.

THIS witch got two ladies to visit her. One of them belonged to the court, and her husband had been sent on a far and difficult embassy. The other was a young widow whose husband had lately died, and who had since lost her sight. Watho lodged them in different parts of her castle, and they did not know of each other's existence.

The castle stood on the side of a hill sloping gently down into a narrow valley, in which was a river, with a pebbly channel and a continual song. The garden went down to the bank of the river, enclosed by high walls, which crossed the river and there stopped.

Each wall had a double row of battlements, and between the rows was a narrow walk.

In the topmost story of the castle the Lady Aurora occupied a spacious apartment of several large rooms looking southward. The windows projected oriel-wise over the garden below, and there was a splendid view from them both up and down and across the river. The opposite side of the valley was steep, but not very high. Far away snow-peaks were visible. These rooms Aurora seldom left, but their airy spaces, the brilliant landscape and sky, the plentiful sunlight, the musical instruments, books, pictures, curiosities, with the company of Watho who made herself charming, precluded all dulness. She had venison and feathered game to eat, milk and pale sunny sparkling wine to drink.

She had hair of the yellow gold, waved and rippled; her skin was fair, not white

like Watho's, and her eyes were of the blue of the heavens when bluest; her features were delicate but strong, her mouth large and finely curved, and haunted with smiles.

CHAPTER III.

VESPER.

BEHIND the castle the hill rose abruptly; the north-eastern tower, indeed, was in contact with the rock, and communicated with the interior of it. For in the rock was a series of chambers, known only to Watho and the one servant whom she trusted, called Falca. Some former owner had constructed these chambers after the tomb of an Egyptian king, and probably with the same design, for in the centre of one of them stood what could only be a sarcophagus, but that and others were walled off. The sides and roofs of them were carved in low relief, and curiously painted. Here the witch lodged the

blind lady, whose name was Vesper. Her eyes were black, with long black lashes; her skin had a look of darkened silver, but was of purest tint and grain; her hair was black and fine and straight-flowing; her features were exquisitely formed, and if less beautiful yet more lovely from sadness; she always looked as if she wanted to lie down and not rise again. She did not know she was lodged in a tomb, though now and then she wondered she never touched a window. There were many couches, covered with richest silk, and soft as her own cheek, for her to lie upon; and the carpets were so thick, she might have cast herself down anywhere—as befitted a tomb. The place was dry and warm, and cunningly pierced for air, so that it was always fresh, and lacked only sunlight. There the witch fed her upon milk, and wine dark as a carbuncle, and pomegranates, and purple grapes, and birds that dwell in marshy places; and she

played to her mournful tunes, and caused wailful violins to attend her, and told her sad tales, thus holding her ever in an atmosphere of sweet sorrow.

CHAPTER IV.

PHOTOGEN.

WATHO at length had her desire, for witches often get what they want: a splendid boy was born to the fair Aurora. Just as the sun rose, he opened his eyes. Watho carried him immediately to a distant part of the castle, and persuaded the mother that he never cried but once, dying the moment he was born. Overcome with grief, Aurora left the castle as soon as she was able, and Watho never invited her again.

And now the witch's care was, that the child should not know darkness. Persistently she trained him until at last he never slept during the day, and never woke during the night. She never let him see anything black, and even kept all dull colours out of

his way. Never, if she could help it, would she let a shadow fall upon him, watching against shadows as if they had been live things that would hurt him. All day he basked in the full splendour of the sun, in the same large rooms his mother had occupied. Watho used him to the sun, until he could bear more of it than any dark-blooded African. In the hottest of every day, she stript him and laid him in it, that he might ripen like a peach; and the boy rejoiced in it, and would resist being dressed again. She brought all her knowledge to bear on making his muscles strong and elastic and swiftly responsive—that his soul, she said laughing, might sit in every fibre, be all in every part, and awake the moment of call. His hair was of the red gold, but his eyes grew darker as he grew, until they were as black as Vesper's. He was the merriest of creatures, always laughing, always loving, for a moment raging, then laughing afresh. Watho called him Photogen.

CHAPTER V.

NYCTERIS.

FIVE or six months after the birth of Photogen, the dark lady also gave birth to a baby: in the windowless tomb of a blind mother, in the dead of night, under the feeble rays of a lamp in an alabaster globe, a girl came into the darkness with a wail. And just as she was born for the first time, Vesper was born for the second, and passed into a world as unknown to her as this was to her child—who would have to be born yet again before she could see her mother.

Watho called her Nycteris, and she grew as like Vesper as possible—in all but one particular. She had the same dark skin, dark eyelashes and brows, dark hair, and

gentle sad look; but she had just the eyes of Aurora, the mother of Photogen, and if they grew darker as she grew older, it was only a darker blue. Watho, with the help of Falca, took the greatest possible care of her—in every way consistent with her plans, that is,—the main point in which was that she should never see any light but what came from the lamp. Hence her optic nerves, and indeed her whole apparatus for seeing, grew both larger and more sensitive; her eyes, indeed, stopped short only of being too large. Under her dark hair and forehead and eyebrows, they looked like two breaks in a cloudy night-sky, through which peeped the heaven where the stars and no clouds live. She was a sadly dainty little creature. No one in the world except those two was aware of the being of the little bat. Watho trained her to sleep during the day, and wake during the night. She taught her music, in which she was herself a proficient, and taught her scarcely anything else.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW PHOTOGEN GREW.

THE hollow in which the castle of Watho lay, was a cleft in a plain rather than a valley among hills, for at the top of its steep sides, both north and south, was a table-land, large and wide. It was covered with rich grass and flowers, with here and there a wood, the outlying colony of a great forest. These grassy plains were the finest hunting grounds in the world. Great herds of small, but fierce cattle, with humps and shaggy manes, roved about them, also antelopes and gnus, and the tiny roedeer, while the woods were swarming with wild creatures. The tables of the castle were mainly supplied

from them. The chief of Watho's huntsmen was a fine fellow, and when Photogen began to outgrow the training she could give him, she handed him over to Fargu. He with a will set about teaching him all he knew. He got him pony after pony, larger and larger as he grew, every one less manageable than that which had preceded it, and advanced him from pony to horse, and from horse to horse, until he was equal to anything in that kind which the country produced. In similar fashion he trained him to the use of bow and arrow, substituting every three months a stronger bow and longer arrows; and soon he became, even on horseback, a wonderful archer. He was but fourteen when he killed his first bull, causing jubilation among the huntsmen, and, indeed, through all the castle, for there too he was the favourite. Every day, almost as soon as the sun was up, he went out hunting, and would in general be out nearly the whole of the day.

But Watho had laid upon Fargu just one commandment, namely, that Photogen should on no account, whatever the plea, be out until sundown, or so near it as to wake in him the desire of seeing what was going to happen; and this commandment Fargu was anxiously careful not to break; for, although he would not have trembled had a whole herd of bulls come down upon him, charging at full speed across the level, and not an arrow left in his quiver, he was more than afraid of his mistress. When she looked at him in a certain way, he felt, he said, as if his heart turned to ashes in his breast, and what ran in his veins was no longer blood, but milk and water. So that, ere long, as Photogen grew older, Fargu began to tremble, for he found it steadily growing harder to restrain him. So full of life was he, as Fargu said to his mistress, much to her content, that he was more like a live thunderbolt than a human being. He did not know what fear was, and

that not because he did not know danger; for he had had a severe laceration from the razor-like tusk of a boar—whose spine, however, he had severed with one blow of his hunting-knife, before Fargu could reach him with defence. When he would spur his horse into the midst of a herd of bulls, carrying only his bow and his short sword, or shoot an arrow into a herd, and go after it as if to reclaim it for a runaway shaft, arriving in time to follow it with a spear-thrust before the wounded animal knew which way to charge, Fargu thought with terror how it would be when he came to know the temptation of the huddle-spot leopards, and the knife-clawed lynxes, with which the forest was haunted. For the boy had been so steeped in the sun, from childhood so saturated with his influence, that he looked upon every danger from a sovereign height of courage. When, therefore, he was approaching his sixteenth year, Fargu ventured to

beg of Watho that she would lay her commands upon the youth himself, and release him from responsibility for him. One might as soon hold a tawny-maned lion as Photogen, he said. Watho called the youth, and in the presence of Fargu laid her command upon him never to be out when the rim of the sun should touch the horizon, accompanying the prohibition with hints of consequences, none the less awful that they were obscure. Photogen listened respectfully, but, knowing neither the taste of fear nor the temptation of the night, her words were but sounds to him.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW NYCTERIS GREW.

THE little education she intended Nycteris to have, Watho gave her by word of mouth. Not meaning she should have light enough to read by, to leave other reasons unmentioned, she never put a book in her hands. Nycteris, however, saw so much better than Watho imagined, that the light she gave her was quite sufficient, and she managed to coax Falca into teaching her the letters, after which she taught herself to read, and Falca now and then brought her a child's book. But her chief pleasure was in her instrument. Her very fingers loved it, and would wander about over its keys like feeding sheep.

She was not unhappy. She knew nothing of the world except the tomb in which she dwelt, and had some pleasure in everything she did. But she desired, nevertheless, something more or different. She did not know what it was, and the nearest she could come to expressing it to herself was—that she wanted more room. Watho and Falca would go from her beyond the shine of the lamp, and come again; therefore surely there must be more room somewhere. As often as she was left alone, she would fall to poring over the coloured bas-reliefs on the walls. These were intended to represent various of the powers of Nature under allegorical similitudes, and as nothing can be made that does not belong to the general scheme, she could not fail at least to imagine a flicker of relationship between some of them, and thus a shadow of the reality of things found its way to her.

There was one thing, however, which

moved and taught her more than all the rest—the lamp, namely, that hung from the ceiling, which she always saw alight, though she never saw the flame, only the slight condensation towards the centre of the alabaster globe. And besides the operation of the light itself after its kind, the indefiniteness of the globe, and the softness of the light, giving her the feeling as if her eyes could go in and into its whiteness, were somehow also associated with the idea of space and room. She would sit for an hour together gazing up at the lamp, and her heart would swell as she gazed. She would wonder what had hurt her, when she found her face wet with tears, and then would wonder how she could have been hurt without knowing it. She never looked thus at the lamp except when she was alone.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LAMP.

WATHO having given orders, took it for granted they were obeyed, and that Falca was all night long with Nycteris, whose day it was. But Falca could not get into the habit of sleeping through the day, and would often leave her alone half the night. Then it seemed to Nycteris that the white lamp was watching over her. As it was never permitted to go out—while she was awake at least—Nycteris, except by shutting her eyes, knew less about darkness than she did about light. Also, the lamp being fixed high overhead, and in the centre of everything, she did not know much about shadows either.

The few there were fell almost entirely on the floor, or kept like mice about the foot of the walls.

Once, when she was thus alone, there came the noise of a far-off rumbling: she had never before heard a sound of which she did not know the origin, and here therefore was a new sign of something beyond these chambers. Then came a trembling, then a shaking; the lamp dropped from the ceiling to the floor with a great crash, and she felt as if both her eyes were hard shut and both her hands over them. She concluded that it was the darkness that had made the rumbling and the shaking, and rushing into the room, had thrown down the lamp. She sat trembling. The noise and the shaking ceased, but the light did not return. The darkness had eaten it up!

Her lamp gone, the desire at once awoke to get out of her prison. She scarcely knew what *out* meant; out of one room into

another, where there was not even a dividing door, only an open arch, was all she knew of the world. But suddenly she remembered that she had heard Falca speak of the lamp *going out:* this must be what she had meant? And if the lamp had gone out, where had it gone? Surely where Falca went, and like her it would come again. But she could not wait. The desire to go out grew irresistible. She must follow her beautiful lamp! She must find it! She must see what it was about!

Now there was a curtain covering a recess in the wall, where some of her toys and gymnastic things were kept; and from behind that curtain Watho and Falca always appeared, and behind it they vanished. How they came out of solid wall, she had not an idea, all up to the wall was open space, and all beyond it seemed wall; but clearly the first and only thing she could do, was to feel her way behind the curtain. It was so dark

that a cat could not have caught the largest of mice. Nycteris could see better than any cat, but now her great eyes were not of the smallest use to her. As she went she trod upon a piece of the broken lamp. She had never worn shoes or stockings, and the fragment, though, being of soft alabaster, it did not cut, yet hurt her foot. She did not know what it was, but as it had not been there before the darkness came, she suspected that it had to do with the lamp. She kneeled therefore, and searched with her hands, and bringing two large pieces together, recognized the shape of the lamp. Therewith it flashed upon her that the lamp was dead, that this brokenness was the death of which she had read without understanding, that the darkness had killed the lamp. What then could Falca have meant when she spoke of the lamp *going out?* There was the lamp—dead, indeed, and so changed that she would never have taken it for a lamp but for the shape!

No, it was not the lamp any more now it was dead, for all that made it a lamp was gone, namely, the bright shining of it. Then it must be the shine, the light, that had gone out! That must be what Falca meant—and it must be somewhere in the other place in the wall. She started afresh after it, and groped her way to the curtain.

Now she had never in her life tried to get out, and did not know how; but instinctively she began to move her hands about over one of the walls behind the curtain, half expecting them to go into it, as she supposed Watho and Falca did. But the wall repelled her with inexorable hardness, and she turned to the one opposite. In so doing, she set her foot upon an ivory die, and as it met sharply the same spot the broken alabaster had already hurt, she fell forward with her outstretched hands against the wall. Something gave way, and she tumbled out of the cavern.

CHAPTER IX.

OUT.

BUT alas! *out* was very much like *in*, for the same enemy, the darkness, was here also. The next moment, however, came a great gladness—a firefly, which had wandered in from the garden. She saw the tiny spark in the distance. With slow pulsing ebb and throb of light, it came pushing itself through the air, drawing nearer and nearer, with that motion which more resembles swimming than flying, and the light seemed the source of its own motion.

"My lamp! my lamp!" cried Nycteris. "It is the shiningness of my lamp, which the cruel darkness drove out. My good lamp

has been waiting for me here all the time! It knew I would come after it, and waited to take me with it."

She followed the firefly, which, like herself, was seeking the way out. If it did not know the way, it was yet light; and, because all light is one, any light may serve to guide to more light. If she was mistaken in thinking it the spirit of her lamp, it was of the same spirit as her lamp—and had wings. The gold-green jet-boat, driven by light, went throbbing before her through a long narrow passage. Suddenly it rose higher, and the same moment Nycteris fell upon an ascending stair. She had never seen a stair before, and found going-up a curious sensation. Just as she reached what seemed the top, the firefly ceased to shine, and so disappeared. She was in utter darkness once more. But when we are following the light, even its extinction is a guide. If the firefly had gone on shining, Nycteris would have seen the stair

turn, and would have gone up to Watho's bedroom; whereas now, feeling straight before her, she came to a latched door, which after a good deal of trying she managed to open—and stood in a maze of wondering perplexity, awe, and delight. What was it? Was it outside of her, or something taking place in her head? Before her was a very long and very narrow passage, broken up she could not tell how, and spreading out above and on all sides to an infinite height and breadth and distance—as if space itself were growing out of a trough. It was brighter than her rooms had ever been—brighter than if six alabaster lamps had been burning in them. There was a quantity of strange streaking and mottling about it, very different from the shapes on her walls. She was in a dream of pleasant perplexity, of delightful bewilderment. She could not tell whether she was upon her feet or drifting about like the firefly, driven by the pulses of an inward

bliss. But she knew little as yet of her inheritance. Unconsciously she took one step forward from the threshold, and the girl who had been from her very birth a troglodyte, stood in the ravishing glory of a southern night, lit by a perfect moon—not the moon of our northern clime, but a moon like silver glowing in a furnace—a moon one could see to be a globe—not far off, a mere flat disc on the face of the blue, but hanging down halfway, and looking as if one could see all round it by a mere bending of the neck.

"It is my lamp!" she said, and stood dumb with parted lips. She looked and felt as if she had been standing there in silent ecstasy from the beginning.

"No, it is not my lamp," she said after a while; "it is the mother of all the lamps."

And with that she fell on her knees, and spread out her hands to the moon. She could not in the least have told what was in

her mind, but the action was in reality just a begging of the moon to be what she was—that precise incredible splendour hung in the far-off roof, that very glory essential to the being of poor girls born and bred in caverns. It was a resurrection—nay, a birth itself, to Nycteris. What the vast blue sky, studded with tiny sparks like the heads of diamond nails, could be; what the moon, looking so absolutely content with light—why, she knew less about them than you and I! but the greatest of astronomers might envy the rapture of such a first impression at the age of sixteen. Immeasurably imperfect it was, but false the impression could not be, for she saw with the eyes made for seeing, and saw indeed what many men are too wise to see.

As she knelt, something softly flapped her, embraced her, stroked her, fondled her. She rose to her feet, but saw nothing, did not know what it was. It was likest a woman's breath. For she knew nothing of the air

even, had never breathed the still newborn freshness of the world. Her breath had come to her only through long passages and spirals in the rock. Still less did she know of the air alive with motion—of that thrice blessed thing, the wind of a summer night. It was like a spiritual wine, filling her whole being with an intoxication of purest joy. To breathe was a perfect existence. It seemed to her the light itself she drew into her lungs. Possessed by the power of the gorgeous night, she seemed at one and the same moment annihilated and glorified.

She was in the open passage or gallery that ran round the top of the garden walls, between the cleft battlements, but she did not once look down to see what lay beneath. Her soul was drawn to the vault above her, with its lamp and its endless room. At last she burst into tears, and her heart was relieved, as the night itself is relieved by its lightning and rain.

And now she grew thoughtful. She must hoard this splendour! What a little ignorance her gaolers had made of her! Life was a mighty bliss, and they had scraped hers to the bare bone! They must not know that she knew. She must hide her knowledge—hide it even from her own eyes, keeping it close in her bosom, content to know that she had it, even when she could not brood on its presence, feasting her eyes with its glory. She turned from the vision, therefore, with a sigh of utter bliss, and with soft quiet steps and groping hands, stole back into the darkness of the rock. What was darkness or the laziness of Time's feet to one who had seen what she had that night seen? She was lifted above all weariness—above all wrong.

When Falca entered, she uttered a cry of terror. But Nycteris called to her not to be afraid, and told her how there had come a rumbling and a shaking, and the lamp had

fallen. Then Falca went and told her mistress, and within an hour a new globe hung in the place of the old one. Nycteris thought it did not look so bright and clear as the former, but she made no lamentation over the change; she was far too rich to heed it. For now, prisoner as she knew herself, her heart was full of glory and gladness; at times she had to hold herself from jumping up, and going dancing and singing about the room. When she slept, instead of dull dreams, she had splendid visions. There were times, it is true, when she became restless, and impatient to look upon her riches, but then she would reason with herself, saying, "What does it matter if I sit here for ages with my poor pale lamp, when out there a lamp is burning at which ten thousand little lamps are glowing with wonder?"

She never doubted she had looked upon the day and the sun, of which she had read;

and always when she read of the day and the sun, she had the night and the moon in her mind; and when she read of the night and the moon, she thought only of the cave and the lamp that hung there.

CHAPTER X.

THE GREAT LAMP.

It was some time before she had a second opportunity of going out, for Falca, since the fall of the lamp, had been a little more careful, and seldom left her for long. But one night, having a little headache, Nycteris lay down upon her bed, and was lying with her eyes closed, when she heard Falca come to her, and felt she was bending over her. Disinclined to talk, she did not open her eyes, and lay quite still. Satisfied that she was asleep, Falca left her, moving so softly that her very caution made Nycteris open her eyes and look after her—just in time to see her vanish—through a picture, as it

seemed, that hung on the wall a long way from the usual place of issue. She jumped up, her headache forgotten, and ran in the opposite direction; got out, groped her way to the stair, climbed, and reached the top of the wall.—Alas! the great room was not so light as the little one she had left. Why?—Sorrow of sorrows! the great lamp was gone! Had its globe fallen? and its lovely light gone out upon great wings, a resplendent firefly, oaring itself through a yet grander and lovelier room? She looked down to see if it lay anywhere broken to pieces on the carpet below; but she could not even see the carpet. But surely nothing very dreadful could have happened—no rumbling or shaking, for there were all the little lamps shining brighter than before, not one of them looking as if any unusual matter had befallen. What if each of those little lamps was growing into a big lamp, and after being a big lamp for a while, had to go

out and grow a bigger lamp still—out there, beyond this *out?*—Ah! here was the living thing that would not be seen, come to her again—bigger to-night! with such loving kisses, and such liquid strokings of her cheeks and forehead, gently tossing her hair, and delicately toying with it! But it ceased, and all was still. Had it gone out? What would happen next? Perhaps the little lamps had not to grow great lamps, but to fall one by one and go out first?—With that, came from below a sweet scent, then another, and another. Ah, how delicious! Perhaps they were all coming to her only on their way out after the great lamp!—Then came the music of the river, which she had been too absorbed in the sky to note the first time. What was it? Alas! alas! another sweet living thing on its way out. They were all marching slowly out in long lovely file, one after the other, each taking its leave of her as it passed! It must

be so: here were more and more sweet sounds, following and fading! The whole of the *Out* was going out again; it was all going after the great lovely lamp! She would be left the only creature in the solitary day! Was there nobody to hang up a new lamp for the old one, and keep the creatures from going?—She crept back to her rock very sad. She tried to comfort herself by saying that anyhow there would be room out there; but as she said it she shuddered at the thought of *empty* room.

When next she succeeded in getting out, a half-moon hung in the east: a new lamp had come, she thought, and all would be well.

It would be endless to describe the phases of feeling through which Nycteris passed, more numerous and delicate than those of a thousand changing moons. A fresh bliss bloomed in her soul with every varying aspect of infinite nature. Ere long she

began to suspect that the new moon was the old moon, gone out and come in again like herself; also that, unlike herself, it wasted and grew again; that it was indeed a live thing, subject like herself to caverns, and keepers, and solitudes, escaping and shining when it could. Was it a prison like hers it was shut in? and did it grow dark when the lamp left it? Where could be the way into it?—With that first she began to look below, as well as above and around her; and then first noted the tops of the trees between her and the floor. There were palms with their red-fingered hands full of fruit; eucalyptus trees crowded with little boxes of powder-puffs; oleanders with their half-caste roses; and orange trees with their clouds of young silver stars, and their aged balls of gold. Her eyes could see colours invisible to ours in the moonlight, and all these she could distinguish well, though at first she took them for the shapes

and colours of the carpet of the great room. She longed to get down among them, now she saw they were real creatures, but she did not know how. She went along the whole length of the wall to the end that crossed the river, but found no way of going down. Above the river she stopped to gaze with awe upon the rushing water. She knew nothing of water but from what she drank and what she bathed in; and, as the moon shone on the dark, swift stream, singing lustily as it flowed, she did not doubt the river was alive, a swift rushing serpent of life, going—out?—whither? And then she wondered if what was brought into her rooms had been killed that she might drink it, and have her bath in it.

Once when she stepped out upon the wall, it was into the midst of a fierce wind. The trees were all roaring. Great clouds were rushing along the skies, and tumbling over the little lamps: the great lamp had not

come yet. All was in tumult. The wind seized her garments and hair, and shook them as if it would tear them from her. What could she have done to make the gentle creature so angry? Or was this another creature altogether—of the same kind, but hugely bigger, and of a very different temper and behaviour? But the whole place was angry! Or was it that the creatures dwelling in it, the wind, and the trees, and the clouds, and the river, had all quarrelled, each with all the rest? Would the whole come to confusion and disorder? But, as she gazed wondering and disquieted, the moon, larger than ever she had seen her, came lifting herself above the horizon to look, broad and red as if she, too, were swollen with anger that she had been roused from her rest by their noise, and compelled to hurry up to see what her children were about, thus rioting in her absence, lest they should rack the whole frame of things. And as she rose, the loud

wind grew quieter and scolded less fiercely, the trees grew stiller and moaned with a lower complaint, and the clouds hunted and hurled themselves less wildly across the sky. And as if she were pleased that her children obeyed her very presence, the moon grew smaller as she ascended the heavenly stair; her puffed cheeks sank, her complexion grew clearer, and a sweet smile spread over her countenance, as peacefully she rose and rose. But there was treason and rebellion in her court; for, ere she reached the top of her great stairs, the clouds had assembled, forgetting their late wars, and very still they were as they laid their heads together and conspired. Then combining, and lying silently in wait until she came near, they threw themselves upon her, and swallowed her up. Down from the roof came spots of wet, faster and faster, and they wetted the cheeks of Nycteris; and what could they be but the tears of the moon, crying because her

children were smothering her? Nycteris wept too, and not knowing what to think, stole back in dismay to her room.

The next time, she came out in fear and trembling. There was the moon still! away in the west — poor, indeed, and old, and looking dreadfully worn, as if all the wild beasts in the sky had been gnawing at her— but there she was, alive still, and able to shine!

CHAPTER XI.

THE SUNSET.

KNOWING nothing of darkness, or stars, or moon, Photogen spent his days in hunting. On a great white horse he swept over the grassy plains, glorying in the sun, fighting the wind, and killing the buffaloes.

One morning, when he happened to be on the ground a little earlier than usual, and before his attendants, he caught sight of an animal unknown to him, stealing from a hollow into which the sunrays had not yet reached. Like a swift shadow it sped over the grass, slinking southward to the forest. He gave chase, noted the body of a buffalo it had half eaten, and pursued it the harder. But with great leaps and bounds the creature

shot farther and farther ahead of him, and vanished. Turning therefore defeated, he met Fargu, who had been following him as fast as his horse could carry him.

"What animal was that, Fargu?" he asked. "How he did run!"

Fargu answered he might be a leopard, but he rather thought from his pace and look that he was a young lion.

"What a coward he must be!" said Photogen.

"Don't be too sure of that," rejoined Fargu. "He is one of the creatures the sun makes uncomfortable. As soon as the sun is down, he will be brave enough."

He had scarcely said it, when he repented; nor did he regret it the less when he found that Photogen made no reply. But alas! said was said.

"Then," said Photogen to himself, "that contemptible beast is one of the terrors of sundown, of which Madam Watho spoke!"

He hunted all day, but not with his usual spirit. He did not ride so hard, and did not kill one buffalo. Fargu to his dismay observed also that he took every pretext for moving farther south, nearer to the forest. But all at once, the sun now sinking in the west, he seemed to change his mind, for he turned his horse's head, and rode home so fast that the rest could not keep him in sight. When they arrived, they found his horse in the stable, and concluded that he had gone into the castle. But he had in truth set out again by the back of it. Crossing the river a good way up the valley, he re-ascended to the ground they had left, and just before sunset reached the skirts of the forest.

The level orb shone straight in between the bare stems, and saying to himself he could not fail to find the beast, he rushed into the wood. But even as he entered, he turned, and looked to the west. The rim of

the red was touching the horizon, all jagged with broken hills. "Now," said Photogen, we shall see;" but he said it in the face of a darkness he had not proved. The moment the sun began to sink among the spikes and saw-edges, with a kind of sudden flap at his heart a fear inexplicable laid hold of the youth; and as he had never felt anything of the kind before, the very fear itself terrified him. As the sun sank, it rose like the shadow of the world, and grew deeper and darker. He could not even think what it might be, so utterly did it enfeeble him. When the last flaming scimitar-edge of the sun went out like a lamp, his horror seemed to blossom into very madness. Like the closing lids of an eye—for there was no twilight, and this night no moon—the terror and the darkness rushed together, and he knew them for one. He was no longer the man he had known, or rather thought himself. The courage he had had was in no

sense his own—he had only had courage, not been courageous; it had left him, and he could scarcely stand—certainly not stand straight, for not one of his joints could he make stiff or keep from trembling. He was but a spark of the sun, in himself nothing.

The beast was behind him—stealing upon him! He turned. All was dark in the wood, but to his fancy the darkness here and there broke into pairs of green eyes, and he had not the power even to raise his bow-hand from his side. In the strength of despair he strove to rouse courage enough —not to fight—that he did not even desire —but to run. Courage to flee home was all he could ever imagine, and it would not come. But what he had not, was ignominiously given him. A cry in the wood, half a screech, half a growl, sent him running like a boar-wounded cur. It was not even himself that ran, it was the fear that had come alive in his legs: he did not know

that they moved. But as he ran he grew able to run—gained courage at least to be a coward. The stars gave a little light. Over the grass he sped, and nothing followed him. "How fallen, how changed," from the youth who had climbed the hill as the sun went down! A mere contempt to himself, the self that contemned was a coward with the self it contemned! There lay the shapeless black of a buffalo, humped upon the grass: he made a wide circuit, and swept on like a shadow driven in the wind. For the wind had arisen, and added to his terror: it blew from behind him. He reached the brow of the valley, and shot down the steep descent like a falling star. Instantly the whole upper country behind him arose and pursued him! The wind came howling after him, filled with screams, shrieks, yells, roars, laughter, and chattering, as if all the animals of the forest were careering with it. In his ears was a trampling rush, the thunder of

the hoofs of the cattle, in career from every quarter of the wide plains to the brow of the hill above him! He fled straight for the castle, scarcely with breath enough to pant.

As he reached the bottom of the valley, the moon peered up over its edge. He had never seen the moon before—except in the daytime, when he had taken her for a thin bright cloud. She was a fresh terror to him —so ghostly! so ghastly! so gruesome!— so knowing as she looked over the top of her garden-wall upon the world outside! That was the night itself! the darkness alive —and after him! the horror of horrors coming down the sky to curdle his blood, and turn his brain to a cinder! He gave a sob, and made straight for the river, where it ran between the two walls, at the bottom of the garden. He plunged in, struggled through, clambered up the bank, and fell senseless on the grass.

friendly to them. A soft little wind was out among the trees, running now here, now there, like a child that had got its will. She went dancing over the grass, looking behind her at her shadow, as she went. At first she had taken it for a little black creature that made game of her, but when she perceived that it was only where she kept the moon away, and that every tree, however great and grand a creature, had also one of these strange attendants, she soon learned not to mind it, and by and by it became the source of as much amusement to her, as to any kitten its tail. It was long before she was quite at home with the trees, however. At one time they seemed to disapprove of her; at another not even to know she was there, and to be altogether taken up with their own business. Suddenly, as she went from one to another of them, looking up with awe at the murmuring mystery of their branches and leaves, she spied one a little

would not let her through; nor with all her searching could she discover wherein lay the cause of the change. Then first she felt the pressure of her prison-walls, and turning, half in despair, groped her way to the picture where she had once seen Falca disappear. There she soon found the spot by pressing upon which the wall yielded. It let her through into a sort of cellar, where was a glimmer of light from a sky whose blue was paled by the moon. From the cellar she got into a long passage, into which the moon was shining, and came to a door. She managed to open it, and, to her great joy, found herself in *the other place*, not on the top of the wall, however, but in the garden she had longed to enter. Noiseless as a fluffy moth she flitted away into the covert of the trees and shrubs, her bare feet welcomed by the softest of carpets, which, by the very touch, her feet knew to be alive, whence it came that it was so sweet and

friendly to them. A soft little wind was out among the trees, running now here, now there, like a child that had got its will. She went dancing over the grass, looking behind her at her shadow, as she went. At first she had taken it for a little black creature that made game of her, but when she perceived that it was only where she kept the moon away, and that every tree, however great and grand a creature, had also one of these strange attendants, she soon learned not to mind it, and by and by it became the source of as much amusement to her, as to any kitten its tail. It was long before she was quite at home with the trees, however. At one time they seemed to disapprove of her; at another not even to know she was there, and to be altogether taken up with their own business. Suddenly, as she went from one to another of them, looking up with awe at the murmuring mystery of their branches and leaves, she spied one a little

way off, which was very different from all the rest. It was white, and dark, and sparkling, and spread like a palm—a small slender palm, without much head; and it grew very fast, and sang as it grew. But it never grew any bigger, for just as fast as she could see it growing, it kept falling to pieces. When she got close to it, she discovered that it was a water-tree—made of just such water as she washed with—only it was alive of course, like the river—a different sort of water from that, doubtless, seeing the one crept swiftly along the floor, and the other shot straight up, and fell, and swallowed itself, and rose again. She put her feet into the marble basin, which was the flower-pot in which it grew. It was full of real water, living and cool—so nice, for the night was hot!

But the flowers! ah, the flowers! she was friends with them from the very first. What wonderful creatures they were!—and

so kind and beautiful—always sending out such colours and such scents—red scent, and white scent, and yellow scent—for the other creatures! The one that was invisible and everywhere, took such a quantity of their scents, and carried it away! yet they did not seem to mind. It was their talk, to show they were alive, and not painted like those on the walls of her rooms, and on the carpets.

She wandered along down the garden, until she reached the river. Unable then to get any further — for she was a little afraid, and justly, of the swift watery serpent—she dropped on the grassy bank, dipped her feet in the water, and felt it running and pushing against them. For a long time she sat thus, and her bliss seemed complete, as she gazed at the river, and watched the broken picture of the great lamp overhead, moving up one side of the roof, to go down the other.

CHAPTER XIII.

SOMETHING QUITE NEW.

A BEAUTIFUL moth brushed across the great blue eyes of Nycteris. She sprang to her feet to follow it—not in the spirit of the hunter, but of the lover. Her heart—like every heart, if only its fallen sides were cleared away—was an inexhaustible fountain of love: she loved everything she saw. But as she followed the moth, she caught sight of something lying on the bank of the river, and not yet having learned to be afraid of anything, ran straight to see what it was. Reaching it, she stood amazed. Another girl like herself! But what a strange-looking girl!—so curiously dressed too!—and not able to move! Was she dead?

Filled suddenly with pity, she sat down, lifted Photogen's head, laid it on her lap, and began stroking his face. Her warm hands brought him to himself. He opened his black eyes, out of which had gone all the fire, and looked up with a strange sound of fear, half moan, half gasp. But when he saw her face, he drew a deep breath, and lay motionless—gazing at her: those blue marvels above him, like a better sky, seemed to side with courage and assuage his terror. At length, in a trembling, awed voice, and a half whisper, he said, "Who are you?"

"I am Nycteris," she answered.

"You are a creature of the darkness, and love the night," he said, his fear beginning to move again.

"I may be a creature of the darkness," she replied. "I hardly know what you mean. But I do not love the night. I love the day—with all my heart; and I sleep all the night long."

"How can that be?" said Photogen, rising on his elbow, but dropping his head on her lap again the moment he saw the moon; "—how can it be," he repeated, "when I see your eyes there—wide awake?"

She only smiled and stroked him, for she did not understand him, and thought he did not know what he was saying.

"Was it a dream then?" resumed Photogen, rubbing his eyes. But with that his memory came clear, and he shuddered, and cried, "Oh horrible! horrible! to be turned all at once into a coward! a shameful, contemptible, disgraceful coward! I am ashamed —ashamed—and *so* frightened! It is all so frightful!"

"What is so frightful?" asked Nycteris, with a smile like that of a mother to her child waked from a bad dream.

"All, all," he answered; "all this darkness and the roaring."

"My dear," said Nycteris, "there is no

roaring. How sensitive you must be! What you hear is only the walking of the water, and the running about of the sweetest of all the creatures. She is invisible, and I call her Everywhere, for she goes through all the other creatures and comforts them. Now she is amusing herself, and them too, with shaking them and kissing them, and blowing in their faces. Listen: do you call that roaring? You should hear her when she is rather angry though! I don't know why, but she is sometimes, and then she does roar a little."

"It is so horribly dark!" said Photogen, who, listening while she spoke, had satisfied himself that there was no roaring.

"Dark!" she echoed. "You should be in my room when an earthquake has killed my lamp. I do not understand. How *can* you call this dark? Let me see: yes, you have eyes, and big ones, bigger than Madam Watho's or Falca's—not so big as mine, I

fancy—only I never saw mine. But then—oh yes!—I know now what is the matter! You can't see with them because they are so black. Darkness can't see, of course. Never mind: I will be your eyes, and teach you to see. Look here—at these lovely white things in the grass, with red sharp points all folded together into one. Oh, I love them so! I could sit looking at them all day, the darlings!"

Photogen looked close at the flowers, and thought he had seen something like them before, but could not make them out. As Nycteris had never seen an open daisy, so had he never seen a closed one.

Thus instinctively Nycteris tried to turn him away from his fear; and the beautiful creature's strange lovely talk helped not a little to make him forget it.

"You call it dark!" she said again, as if she could not get rid of the absurdity of the idea; "why, I could count every blade of the

green hair—I suppose it is what the books call grass—within two yards of me! And just look at the great lamp! It is brighter than usual to-day, and I can't think why you should be frightened, or call it dark!"

As she spoke, she went on stroking his cheeks and hair, and trying to comfort him. But oh how miserable he was! and how plainly he looked it! He was on the point of saying that her great lamp was dreadful to him, looking like a witch, walking in the sleep of death; but he was not so ignorant as Nycteris, and knew even in the moonlight that she was a woman, though he had never seen one so young or so lovely before; and while she comforted his fear, her presence made him the more ashamed of it. Besides, not knowing her nature, he might annoy her, and make her leave him to his misery. He lay still therefore, hardly daring to move: all the little life he had seemed to come from her, and if he were to move, she might move;

and if she were to leave him, he must weep like a child.

"How did you come here?" asked Nycteris, taking his face between her hands.

"Down the hill," he answered.

"Where do you sleep?" she asked.

He signed in the direction of the house. She gave a little laugh of delight.

"When you have learned not to be frightened, you will always be wanting to come out with me," she said.

She thought with herself she would ask her presently, when she had come to herself a little, how she had made her escape, for she must, of course, like herself have got out of a cave, in which Watho and Falca had been keeping her.

"Look at the lovely colours," she went on, pointing to a rose-bush, on which Photogen could not see a single flower. "They are far more beautiful—are they not?—than any of the colours upon your walls. And then they are alive, and smell so sweet!"

He wished she would not make him keep opening his eyes to look at things he could not see; and every other moment would start and grasp tight hold of her, as some fresh pang of terror shot into him.

"Come, come, dear!" said Nycteris; "you must not go on this way. You must be a brave girl, and——"

"A girl!" shouted Photogen, and started to his feet in wrath. "If you were a man, I should kill you."

"A man?" repeated Nycteris: "what is that? How could I be that? We are both girls—are we not?"

"No, I am not a girl," he answered; "—although," he added, changing his tone, and casting himself on the ground at her feet, "I have given you too good reason to call me one."

"Oh, I see!" returned Nycteris. "No, of course! you can't be a girl: girls are not afraid—without reason. I understand now:

it is because you are not a girl that you are so frightened."

Photogen twisted and writhed upon the grass.

"No, it is not," he said sulkily; "it is this horrible darkness that creeps into me, goes all through me, into the very marrow of my bones—that is what makes me behave like a girl. If only the sun would rise!"

"The sun! what is it?" cried Nycteris, now in her turn conceiving a vague fear.

Then Photogen broke into a rhapsody, in which he vainly sought to forget his.

"It is the soul, the life, the heart, the glory of the universe," he said. "The worlds dance like motes in his beams. The heart of man is strong and brave in his light, and when it departs his courage grows from him —goes with the sun, and he becomes such as you see me now."

"Then that is not the sun?" said Nycteris, thoughtfully, pointing up to the moon.

"That!" cried Photogen, with utter scorn; "I know nothing about *that*, except that it is ugly and horrible. At best it can be only the ghost of a dead sun. Yes, that is it! That is what makes it look so frightful."

"No," said Nycteris, after a long, thoughtful pause; "you must be wrong there. I think the sun is the ghost of a dead moon, and that is how he is so much more splendid as you say.—Is there, then, another big room, where the sun lives in the roof?"

"I do not know what you mean," replied Photogen. "But you mean to be kind, I know, though you should not call a poor fellow in the dark a girl. If you will let me lie here, with my head in your lap, I should like to sleep. Will you watch me, and take care of me?"

"Yes, that I will," answered Nycteris, forgetting all her own danger.

So Photogen fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SUN.

THERE Nycteris sat, and there the youth lay, all night long, in the heart of the great cone-shadow of the earth, like two Pharaohs in one pyramid. Photogen slept, and slept; and Nycteris sat motionless lest she should wake him, and so betray him to his fear.

The moon rode high in the blue eternity; it was a very triumph of glorious night; the river ran babble-murmuring in deep soft syllables; the fountain kept rushing moon-ward, and blossoming momently to a great silvery flower, whose petals were for ever falling like snow, but with a continuous musical clash, into the bed of its exhaustion

beneath; the wind woke, took a run among the trees, went to sleep, and woke again; the daisies slept on their feet at hers, but she did not know they slept; the roses might well seem awake, for their scent filled the air, but in truth they slept also, and the odour was that of their dreams; the oranges hung like gold lamps in the trees, and their silvery flowers were the souls of their yet unembodied children; the scent of the acacia blooms filled the air like the very odour of the moon herself.

At last, unused to the living air, and weary with sitting so still and so long, Nycteris grew drowsy. The air began to grow cool. It was getting near the time when she too was accustomed to sleep. She closed her eyes just a moment, and nodded—opened them suddenly wide, for she had promised to watch.

In that moment a change had come. The moon had got round, and was fronting her

from the west, and she saw that her face was altered, that she had grown pale, as if she too were wan with fear, and from her lofty place espied a coming terror. The light seemed to be dissolving out of her; she was dying—she was going out! And yet everything around looked strangely clear—clearer than ever she had seen anything before: how could the lamp be shedding more light when she herself had less? Ah, that was just it! See how faint she looked! It was because the light was forsaking her, and spreading itself over the room, that she grew so thin and pale! She was giving up everything! She was melting away from the roof like a bit of sugar in water.

Nycteris was fast growing afraid, and sought refuge with the face upon her lap. How beautiful the creature was!—what to call it she could not think, for it had been angry when she called it what Watho called her. And, wonder upon wonder! now, even

in the cold change that was passing upon the great room, the colour as of a red rose was rising in the wan cheek. What beautiful yellow hair it was that spread over her lap! What great huge breaths the creature took! And what were those curious things it carried? She had seen them on her walls, she was sure.

Thus she talked to herself while the lamp grew paler and paler, and everything kept growing yet clearer. What could it mean? The lamp was dying—going out into the other place of which the creature in her lap had spoken, to be a sun! But why were the things growing clearer before it was yet a sun? That was the point. Was it her growing into a sun that did it? Yes! yes! it was coming death! She knew it, for it was coming upon her also! She felt it coming! What was she about to grow into? Something beautiful, like the creature in her lap? It might be! Anyhow, it must be

death; for all her strength was going out of her, while all around her was growing so light she could not bear it! She must be blind soon! Would she be blind or dead first?

For the sun was rushing up behind her. Photogen woke, lifted his head from her lap, and sprang to his feet. His face was one radiant smile. His heart was full of daring —that of the hunter who will creep into the tiger's den. Nycteris gave a cry, covered her face with her hands, and pressed her eyelids close. Then blindly she stretched out her arms to Photogen, crying, "Oh, I am *so* frightened! What is this? It must be death! I don't wish to die yet. I love this room and the old lamp. I do not want the other place! This is terrible. I want to hide. I want to get into the sweet, soft, dark hands of all the other creatures. Ah me! ah me!"

"What is the matter with you, girl?"

said Photogen, with the arrogance of all male creatures until they have been taught by the other kind. He stood looking down upon her over his bow, of which he was examining the string. "There is no fear of anything now, child. It is day. The sun is all but up. Look! he will be above the brow of yon hill in one moment more! Good-bye. Thank you for my night's lodging. I'm off. Don't be a goose. If ever I can do anything for you—and all that, you know!"

"Don't leave me; oh, don't leave me!" cried Nycteris. "I am dying! I am dying! I cannot move. The light sucks all the strength out of me. And oh, I am *so* frightened!"

But already Photogen had splashed through the river, holding high his bow that it might not get wet. He rushed across the level, and strained up the opposing hill. Hearing no answer, Nycteris removed her

hands. Photogen had reached the top, and the same moment the sunrays alighted upon him: the glory of the king of day crowded blazing upon the golden-haired youth. Radiant as Apollo, he stood in mighty strength, a flashing shape in the midst of flame. He fitted a glowing arrow to a gleaming bow. The arrow parted with a keen musical twang of the bowstring, and Photogen darting after it, vanished with a shout. Up shot Apollo himself, and from his quiver scattered astonishment and exultation. But the brain of poor Nycteris was pierced through and through. She fell down in utter darkness. All around her was a flaming furnace. In despair and feebleness and agony, she crept back, feeling her way with doubt and difficulty and enforced persistence to her cell. When at last the friendly darkness of her chamber folded her about with its cooling and consoling arms, she threw herself on her bed and fell fast

asleep. And there she slept on, one alive in a tomb, while Photogen, above in the sun-glory, pursued the buffaloes on the lofty plain, thinking not once of her where she lay dark and forsaken, whose presence had been his refuge, her eyes and her hands his guardians through the night. He was in his glory and his pride; and the darkness and its disgrace had vanished for a time.

CHAPTER XV.

THE COWARD HERO.

But no sooner had the sun reached the noonstead, than Photogen began to remember the past night in the shadow of that which was at hand, and to remember it with shame. He had proved himself—and not to himself only, but to a girl as well—a coward!—one bold in the daylight, while there was nothing to fear, but trembling like any slave when the night arrived. There was, there must be, something unfair in it! A spell had been cast upon him! He had eaten, he had drunk something that did not agree with courage! In any case he had been taken unprepared! How was he to know what

the going down of the sun would be like? It was no wonder he should have been surprised into terror, seeing it was what it was—in its very nature so terrible! Also, one could not see where danger might be coming from! You might be torn in pieces, carried off, or swallowed up, without even seeing where to strike a blow! Every possible excuse he caught at, eager as a self-lover to lighten his self-contempt. That day he astonished the huntsmen—terrified them with his reckless daring—all to prove to himself he was no coward. But nothing eased his shame. One thing only had hope in it—the resolve to encounter the dark in solemn earnest, now that he knew something of what it was. It was nobler to meet a recognized danger than to rush contemptuously into what seemed nothing—nobler still to encounter a nameless horror. He could conquer fear and wipe out disgrace together. For a marksman and swordsman like him,

he said, one with his strength and courage, there was but danger. Defeat there was not. He knew the darkness now, and when it came he would meet it as fearless and cool as now he felt himself. And again he said, "We shall see!"

He stood under the boughs of a great beech as the sun was going down, far away over the jagged hills: before it was half down, he was trembling like one of the leaves behind him in the first sigh of the night-wind. The moment the last of the glowing disc vanished, he bounded away in terror to gain the valley, and his fear grew as he ran. Down the side of the hill, an abject creature, he went bounding and rolling and running; fell rather than plunged into the river, and came to himself, as before, lying on the grassy bank in the garden.

But when he opened his eyes, there were no girl-eyes looking down into his; there

were only the stars in the waste of the sunless Night—the awful all-enemy he had again dared, but could not encounter. Perhaps the girl was not yet come out of the water! He would try to sleep, for he dared not move, and perhaps when he woke he would find his head on her lap, and the beautiful dark face, with its deep blue eyes, bending over him. But when he woke he found his head on the grass, and although he sprang up with all his courage, such as it was, restored, he did not set out for the chase with such an *elan* as the day before; and, despite the sun-glory in his heart and veins, his hunting was this day less eager; he ate little, and from the first was thoughtful even to sadness. A second time he was defeated and disgraced! Was his courage nothing more than the play of the sunlight on his brain? Was he a mere ball tossed between the light and the dark? Then what a poor contemptible creature he was!

But a third chance lay before him. If he failed the third time, he dared not foreshadow what he must then think of himself! It was bad enough now—but then!

Alas! it went no better. The moment the sun was down, he fled as if from a legion of devils.

Seven times in all, he tried to face the coming night in the strength of the past day, and seven times he failed—failed with such increase of failure, with such a growing sense of ignominy, overwhelming at length all the sunny hours and joining night to night, that, what with misery, self-accusation, and loss of confidence, his daylight courage too began to fade, and at length, from exhaustion, from getting wet, and then lying out of doors all night, and night after night,—worst of all, from the consuming of the deathly fear, and the shame of shame, his sleep forsook him, and on the seventh morning, instead of going to the hunt, he

crawled into the castle, and went to bed. The grand health, over which the witch had taken such pains, had yielded, and in an hour or two he was moaning and crying out in delirium.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN EVIL NURSE.

WATHO was herself ill, as I have said, and was the worse tempered; and, besides, it is a peculiarity of witches, that what works in others to sympathy, works in them to repulsion. Also, Watho had a poor, helpless, rudimentary spleen of a conscience left, just enough to make her uncomfortable, and therefore more wicked. So, when she heard that Photogen was ill, she was angry. Ill, indeed! after all she had done to saturate him with the life of the system, with the solar might itself! He was a wretched failure, the boy! And because he was *her* failure, she was annoyed with him, began

to dislike him, grew to hate him. She looked on him as a painter might upon a picture, or a poet upon a poem, which he had only succeeded in getting into an irrecoverable mess. In the hearts of witches, love and hate lie close together, and often tumble over each other. And whether it was that her failure with Photogen foiled also her plans in regard to Nycteris, or that her illness made her yet more of a devil's wife, certainly Watho now got sick of the girl too, and hated to know her about the castle.

She was not too ill, however, to go to poor Photogen's room and torment him. She told him she hated him like a serpent, and hissed like one as she said it, looking very sharp in the nose and chin, and flat in the forehead. Photogen thought she meant to kill him, and hardly ventured to take anything brought him. She ordered every ray of light to be shut out of his room;

but by means of this he got a little used to the darkness. She would take one of his arrows, and now tickle him with the feather end of it, now prick him with the point till the blood ran down. What she meant finally I cannot tell, but she brought Photogen speedily to the determination of making his escape from the castle: what he should do then he would think afterwards. Who could tell but he might find his mother somewhere beyond the forest! If it were not for the broad patches of darkness that divided day from day, he would fear nothing!

But now, as he lay helpless in the dark, ever and anon would come dawning through it the face of the lovely creature who on that first awful night nursed him so sweetly: was he never to see her again? If she was, as he had concluded, the nymph of the river, why had she not re-appeared? She might have taught him not to fear the night, for plainly she had no fear of it herself! But

then, when the day came, she did seem frightened:—why was that, seeing there was nothing to be afraid of then? Perhaps one so much at home in the darkness, was correspondingly afraid of the light! Then his selfish joy at the rising of the sun, blinding him to her condition, had made him behave to her, in ill return for her kindness, as cruelly as Watho behaved to him! How sweet and dear and lovely she was! If there were wild beasts that came out only at night, and were afraid of the light, why should there not be girls too, made the same way—who could not endure the light, as he could not bear the darkness? If only he could find her again! Ah, how differently he would behave to her! But alas! perhaps the sun had killed her—melted her—burned her up!—dried her up—that was it, if she was the nymph of the river!

CHAPTER XVII.

WATHO'S WOLF.

FROM that dreadful morning Nycteris had never got to be herself again. The sudden light had been almost death to her; and now she lay in the dark with the memory of a terrific sharpness—a something she dared scarcely recall, lest the very thought of it should sting her beyond endurance. But this was as nothing to the pain which the recollection of the rudeness of the shining creature whom she had nursed through his fear caused her; for, the moment his suffering passed over to her, and he was free, the first use he made of his returning strength had been to scorn her! She wondered and wondered; it was all beyond her comprehension.

Before long, Watho was plotting evil against her. The witch was like a sick child weary of his toy: she would pull her to pieces, and see how she liked it. She would set her in the sun, and see her die, like a jelly from the salt ocean cast out on a hot rock. It would be a sight to soothe her wolf-pain. One day, therefore, a little before noon, while Nycteris was in her deepest sleep, she had a darkened litter brought to the door, and in that she made two of her men carry her to the plain above. There they took her out, laid her on the grass, and left her.

Watho watched it all from the top of her high tower, through her telescope; and scarcely was Nycteris left, when she saw her sit up, and the same moment cast herself down again with her face to the ground.

"She'll have a sunstroke," said Watho, "and that'll be the end of her."

Presently, tormented by a fly, a huge-

humped buffalo, with great shaggy mane, came galloping along, straight for where she lay. At sight of the thing on the grass, he started, swerved yards aside, stopped dead, and then came slowly up, looking malicious. Nycteris lay quite still, and never even saw the animal.

"Now she'll be trodden to death!" said Watho. "That's the way those creatures do."

When the buffalo reached her, he sniffed at her all over, and went away; then came back, and sniffed again; then all at once went off as if a demon had him by the tail.

Next came a gnu, a more dangerous animal still, and did much the same; then a gaunt wild boar. But no creature hurt her, and Watho was angry with the whole creation.

At length, in the shade of her hair, the blue eyes of Nycteris began to come to themselves a little, and the first thing they saw

was a comfort. I have told already how she knew the night-daisies, each a sharp-pointed little cone with a red tip; and once she had parted the rays of one of them, with trembling fingers, for she was afraid she was dreadfully rude, and perhaps was hurting it; but she did want, she said to herself, to see what secret it carried so carefully hidden; and she found its golden heart. But now, right under her eyes, inside the veil of her hair, in the sweet twilight of whose blackness she could see it perfectly, stood a daisy with its red tip opened wide into a carmine ring, displaying its heart of gold on a platter of silver. She did not at first recognize it as one of those cones come awake, but a moment's notice revealed what it was. Who then could have been so cruel to the lovely little creature, as to force it open like that, and spread it heart-bare to the terrible death-lamp? Whoever it was, it must be the same that had thrown her out there to be burned

to death in its fire! But she had her hair, and could hang her head, and make a small sweet night of her own about her! She tried to bend the daisy down and away from the sun, and to make its petals hang about it like her hair, but she could not. Alas! it was burned and dead already! She did not know that it could not yield to her gentle force because it was drinking life, with all the eagerness of life, from what she called the death-lamp. Oh, how the lamp burned her!

But she went on thinking—she did not know how; and by and by began to reflect that, as there was no roof to the room except that in which the great fire went rolling about, the little Red-tip must have seen the lamp a thousand times, and must know it quite well! and it had not killed it! Nay, thinking about farther, she began to ask the question whether this, in which she now saw it, might not be its more perfect condition. For not only now did the whole seem perfect,

as indeed it did before, but every part showed its own individual perfection as well, which perfection made it capable of combining with the rest into the higher perfection of a whole. The flower was a lamp itself! The golden heart was the light, and the silver border was the alabaster globe, skilfully broken, and spread wide to let out the glory. Yes; the radiant shape was plainly its perfection! If, then, it was the lamp which had opened it into that shape, the lamp could not be unfriendly to it, but must be of its own kind, seeing it made it perfect! And again, when she thought of it, there was clearly no little resemblance between them. What if the flower then was the little great-grandchild of the lamp, and he was loving it all the time? And what if the lamp did not mean to hurt her, only could not help it? The red tips looked as if the flower had some time or other been hurt: what if the lamp was making the best it could of her—opening her out

somehow like the flower? She would bear it patiently, and see. But how coarse the colour of the grass was! Perhaps, however, her eyes not being made for the bright lamp, she did not see them as they were! Then she remembered how different were the eyes of the creature that was not a girl and was afraid of the darkness! Ah, if the darkness would only come again, all arms, friendly and soft everywhere about her! She would wait and wait, and bear, and be patient.

She lay so still that Watho did not doubt she had fainted. She was pretty sure she would be dead before the night came to revive her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

REFUGE.

FIXING her telescope on the motionless form, that she might see it at once when the morning came, Watho went down from the tower to Photogen's room. He was much better by this time, and before she left him, he had resolved to leave the castle that very night. The darkness was terrible indeed, but Watho was worse than even the darkness, and he could not escape in the day. As soon, therefore, as the house seemed still, he tightened his belt, hung to it his hunting-knife, put a flask of wine and some bread in his pocket, and took his bow and arrows. He got from the house, and made his way at once up to the plain. But what with his illness, the

terrors of the night, and his dread of the wild beasts, when he got to the level he could not walk a step further, and sat down, thinking it better to die than to live. In spite of his fears, however, sleep contrived to overcome him, and he fell at full length on the soft grass.

He had not slept long when he woke with such a strange sense of comfort and security, that he thought the dawn at least must have arrived. But it was dark night about him. And the sky—no, it was not the sky, but the blue eyes of his naiad looking down upon him! Once more he lay with his head in her lap, and all was well, for plainly the girl feared the darkness as little as he the day.

"Thank you," he said. "You are like live armour to my heart; you keep the fear off me. I have been very ill since then. Did you come up out of the river when you saw me cross?"

"I don't live in the water," she answered.

"I live under the pale lamp, and I die under the bright one."

"Ah, yes! I understand now," he returned. "I would not have behaved as I did last time if I had understood; but I thought you were mocking me; and I am so made that I cannot help being frightened at the darkness. I beg your pardon for leaving you as I did, for, as I say, I did not understand. Now I believe you were really frightened. Were you not?"

"I was, indeed," answered Nycteris, "and shall be again. But why you should be, I cannot in the least understand. You must know how gentle and sweet the darkness is, how kind and friendly, how soft and velvety! It holds you to its bosom and loves you. A little while ago, I lay faint and dying under your hot lamp.—What is it you call it?"

"The sun," murmured Photogen: "how I wish he would make haste!"

"Ah! do not wish that. Do not, for my

sake, hurry him. I can take care of you from the darkness, but I have no one to take care of me from the light.—As I was telling you, I lay dying in the sun. All at once I drew a deep breath. A cool wind came and ran over my face. I looked up. The torture was gone, for the death-lamp itself was gone. I hope he does not die and grow brighter yet. My terrible headache was all gone, and my sight was come back. I felt as if I were new made. But I did not get up at once, for I was tired still. The grass grew cool about me, and turned soft in colour. Something wet came upon it, and it was now so pleasant to my feet, that I rose and ran about. And when I had been running about a long time, all at once I found you lying, just as I had been lying a little while before. So I sat down beside you to take care of you, till your life—and my death—should come again."

"How good you are, you beautiful creature!

—Why, you forgave me before ever I asked you!" cried Photogen.

Thus they fell a talking, and he told her what he knew of his history, and she told him what she knew of hers, and they agreed they must get away from Watho as far as ever they could.

"And we must set out at once," said Nycteris.

"The moment the morning comes," returned Photogen.

"We must not wait for the morning," said Nycteris, "for then I shall not be able to move, and what would you do the next night? Besides, Watho sees best in the daytime. Indeed, you must come now, Photogen.—You must."

"I can not; I dare not," said Photogen. "I cannot move. If I but lift my head from your lap, the very sickness of terror seizes me."

"I shall be with you," said Nycteris

soothingly. "I will take care of you till your dreadful sun comes, and then you may leave me, and go away as fast as you can. Only please put me in a dark place first, if there is one to be found."

"I will never leave you again, Nycteris," cried Photogen. "Only wait till the sun comes, and brings me back my strength, and we will go away together, and never, never part any more."

"No, no," persisted Nycteris; "we must go now. And you must learn to be strong in the dark as well as in the day, else you will always be only half brave. I have begun already—not to fight your sun, but to try to get at peace with him, and understand what he really is, and what he means with me—whether to hurt me or to make the best of me. You must do the same with my darkness."

"But you don't know what mad animals there are away there towards the south,"

said Photogen. "They have huge green eyes, and they would eat you up like a bit of celery, you beautiful creature!"

"Come, come! you must," said Nycteris, "or I shall have to pretend to leave you, to make you come. I have seen the green eyes you speak of, and I will take care of you from them."

"You! How can you do that? If it were day now, I could take care of you from the worst of them. But as it is, I can't even see them for this abominable darkness. I could not see your lovely eyes but for the light that is in them; that lets me see straight into heaven through them. They are windows into the very heaven beyond the sky. I believe they are the very place where the stars are made."

"You come then, or I shall shut them," said Nycteris, "and you shan't see them any more till you are good. Come. If you can't see the wild beasts, I can."

"You can! and you ask me to come!" cried Photogen.

"Yes," answered Nycteris. "And more than that, I see them long before they can see me, so that I am able to take care of you."

"But how?" persisted Photogen. "You can't shoot with bow and arrow, or stab with a hunting-knife."

"No, but I can keep out of the way of them all. Why, just when I found you, I was having a game with two or three of them at once. I see, and scent them too, long before they are near me—long before they can see or scent me."

"You don't see or scent any now, do you?" said Photogen, uneasily, rising on his elbow."

"No—none at present. I will look," replied Nycteris, and sprang to her feet.

"Oh, oh! do not leave me—not for a moment," cried Photogen, straining his eyes

to keep her face in sight through the darkness.

"Be quiet, or they will hear you," she returned. "The wind is from the south, and they cannot scent us. I have found out all about that. Ever since the dear dark came, I have been amusing myself with them, getting every now and then just into the edge of the wind, and letting one have a sniff of me."

"Oh, horrible!" cried Photogen. "I hope you will not insist on doing so any more. What was the consequence?"

"Always, the very instant, he turned with flashing eyes, and bounded towards me—only he could not see me, you must remember. But my eyes being so much better than his, I could see him perfectly well, and would run away round him until I scented him, and then I knew he could not find me anyhow. If the wind were to turn, and run the other way now, there might be a whole

army of them down upon us, leaving no room to keep out of their way. You had better come."

She took him by the hand. He yielded and rose, and she led him away. But his steps were feeble, and as the night went on, he seemed more and more ready to sink.

"Oh dear! I am so tired! and so frightened!" he would say.

"Lean on me," Nycteris would return, putting her arm round him, or patting his cheek. "Take a few steps more. Every step away from the castle is clear gain. Lean harder on me. I am quite strong and well now."

So they went on. The piercing night-eyes of Nycteris descried not a few pairs of green ones gleaming like holes in the darkness, and many a round she made to keep far out of their way; but she never said to Photogen she saw them. Carefully she kept him off the uneven places, and on

the softest and smoothest of the grass, talking to him gently all the way as they went—of the lovely flowers and the stars — how comfortable the flowers looked, down in their green beds, and how happy the stars up in their blue beds!

When the morning began to come, he began to grow better, but was dreadfully tired with walking instead of sleeping, especially after being so long ill. Nycteris too, what with supporting him, what with growing fear of the light which was beginning to ooze out of the east, was very tired. At length, both equally exhausted, neither was able to help the other. As if by consent they stopped. Embracing each the other, they stood in the midst of the wide grassy land, neither of them able to move a step, each supported only by the leaning weakness of the other, each ready to fall if the other should move. But while the one grew weaker still, the other had begun to grow

stronger. When the tide of the night began to ebb, the tide of the day began to flow; and now the sun was rushing to the horizon, borne upon its foaming billows. And ever as he came, Photogen revived. At last the sun shot up into the air, like a bird from the hand of the Father of Lights. Nycteris gave a cry of pain, and hid her face in her hands.

"Oh me!" she sighed; "I am *so* frightened! The terrible light stings so!"

But the same instant, through her blindness, she heard Photogen give a low exultant laugh, and the next felt herself caught up: she who all night long had tended and protected him like a child, was now in his arms, borne along like a baby, with her head lying on his shoulder. But she was the greater, for, suffering more, she feared nothing.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WEREWOLF.

At the very moment when Photogen caught up Nycteris, the telescope of Watho was angrily sweeping the table-land. She swung it from her in rage, and running to her room, shut herself up. There she anointed herself from top to toe with a certain ointment; shook down her long red hair, and tied it round her waist; then began to dance, whirling round and round faster and faster, growing angrier and angrier, until she was foaming at the mouth with fury. When Falca went looking for her, she could not find her anywhere.

As the sun rose, the wind slowly changed

and went round, until it blew straight from the north. Photogen and Nycteris were drawing near the edge of the forest, Photogen still carrying Nycteris, when she moved a little on his shoulder uneasily, and murmured in his ear,

"I smell a wild beast—that way, the way the wind is coming."

Photogen turned, looked back towards the castle, and saw a dark speck on the plain. As he looked, it grew larger: it was coming across the grass with the speed of the wind. It came nearer and nearer. It looked long and low, but that might be because it was running at a great stretch. He set Nycteris down under a tree, in the black shadow of its bole, strung his bow, and picked out his heaviest, longest, sharpest arrow. Just as he set the notch on the string, he saw that the creature was a tremendous wolf, rushing straight at him. He loosened his knife in its sheath, drew another arrow half-way from

the quiver, lest the first should fail, and took his aim—at a good distance, to leave time for a second chance. He shot. The arrow rose, flew straight, descended, struck the beast, and started again into the air, doubled like a letter V. Quickly Photogen snatched the other, shot, cast his bow from him, and drew his knife. But the arrow was in the brute's chest, up to the feather; it tumbled heels over head with a great thud of its back on the earth, gave a groan, made a struggle or two, and lay stretched out motionless.

"I've killed it, Nycteris," cried Photogen. "It is a great red wolf."

"Oh, thank you!" answered Nycteris feebly from behind the tree. "I was sure you would. I was not a bit afraid."

Photogen went up to the wolf. It *was* a monster! But he was vexed that his first arrow had behaved so badly, and was the less willing to lose the one that had done him such good service: with a long and a

strong pull, he drew it from the brute's chest. Could he believe his eyes? There lay—no wolf, but Watho, with her hair tied round her waist! The foolish witch had made herself invulnerable, as she supposed, but had forgotten that, to torment Photogen therewith, she had handled one of his arrows. He ran back to Nycteris and told her.

She shuddered and wept, and would not look.

CHAPTER XX.

ALL IS WELL.

THERE was now no occasion to fly a step farther. Neither of them feared any one but Watho. They left her there, and went back. A great cloud came over the sun, and rain began to fall heavily, and Nycteris was much refreshed, grew able to see a little, and with Photogen's help walked gently over the cool wet grass.

They had not gone far before they met Fargu and the other huntsmen. Photogen told them he had killed a great red wolf, and it was Madam Watho. The huntsmen looked grave, but gladness shone through.

"Then," said Fargu, "I will go and bury my mistress."

But when they reached the place, they found she was already buried—in the maws of sundry birds and beasts which had made their breakfast of her.

Then Fargu, overtaking them, would, very wisely, have Photogen go to the king, and tell him the whole story. But Photogen, yet wiser than Fargu, would not set out until he had married Nycteris; "for then," he said, "the king himself can't part us; and if ever two people couldn't do the one without the other, those two are Nycteris and I. She has got to teach me to be a brave man in the dark, and I have got to look after her until she can bear the heat of the sun, and he helps her to see, instead of blinding her."

They were married that very day. And the next day they went together to the king, and told him the whole story. But whom should they find at the court but the father and mother of Photogen, both in high favour

with the king and queen. Aurora nearly died for joy, and told them all how Watho had lied, and made her believe her child was dead.

No one knew anything of the father or mother of Nycteris; but when Aurora saw in the lovely girl her own azure eyes shining through night and its clouds, it made her think strange things, and wonder how even the wicked themselves may be a link to join together the good. Through Watho, the mothers, who had never seen each other, had changed eyes in their children.

The king gave them the castle and lands of Watho, and there they lived and taught each other for many years that were not long. But hardly had one of them passed, before Nycteris had come to love the day best, because it was the clothing and crown of Photogen, and she saw that the day was greater than the night, and the sun more lordly than the moon; and Photogen had

come to love the night best, because it was the mother and home of Nycteris.

"But who knows," Nycteris would say to Photogen, "that, when we go out, we shall not go into a day as much greater than your day as your day is greater than my night?"

THE BUTCHER'S BILLS.

THE BUTCHER'S BILLS.

CHAPTER I.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

I AM going to tell a story of married life. My title will prepare the reader for something hardly heroic; but I trust it will not be found lacking in the one genuine and worthy interest a tale ought to have—namely, that it presents a door through which we may walk into one region or another of the human heart, and there find ourselves not altogether unacquainted or from home.

There was a law among the Jews which forbade the yoking together of certain animals, either because, being unequal in

size or strength, one of them must be oppressed, or for the sake of some lesson thus embodied to the Eastern mind—possibly for both reasons. Half the tragedy would be taken out of social life if this law could be applied to human beings in their various relations. I do not say that this would be well, or that we could afford to lose the result of the tragedy thus occasioned. Neither do I believe that there are so many instances of unequal yoking as the misprising judgments of men by men and women by women might lead us to imagine. Not every one declared by the wisdom of acquaintance to have thrown himself or herself away must therefore be set down as unequally yoked. Or it may even be that the inequality is there, but the loss on the other side. How some people could ever have come together must always be a puzzle until one knows the history of the affair; but not a few whom most of us would judge quite unsuited to each other do

yet get on pretty well from the first, and better and better the longer they are together, and that with mutual advantage, improvement, and development. Essential humanity is deeper than the accidents of individuality; the common is more powerful than the peculiar; and the honest heart will always be learning to act more and more in accordance with the laws of its being. It must be of much more consequence to any lady that her husband should be a man on whose word she can depend than that he should be of a gracious presence. But if instead of coming nearer to a true understanding of each other, the two should from the first keep falling asunder, then something tragic may almost be looked for.

Duncan and Lucy Dempster were a couple the very mention of whose Christian names together would have seemed amusing to the friends who had long ceased to talk of their unfitness. Indeed, I doubt if in their inner-

most privacy they ever addressed each other except as Mr. and Mrs. Dempster. For the first time to see them together, no one could help wondering how the conjunction could have been effected. Dempster was of Scotch descent, but the hereditary high cheek-bone seemed to have got into his nose, which was too heavy a pendant for the low forehead from which it hung. About an inch from the end it took a swift and unexpected curve downwards, and was a curious and abnormal nose, which could not properly be assorted with any known class of noses. A long upper lip, a large, firm, and not quite ugly mouth, with a chin both long and square, completed a face which, with its low forehead, being yet longer than usual, had a particularly equine look. He was rather under the middle height, slender, and well enough made—altogether an ordinary mortal, known on 'Change as an able, keen, and laborious man of business. What his special

business was I do not know. He went to the city by the eight o'clock omnibus every morning, dived into a court, entered a little square, rushed up two flights of stairs to a couple of rooms, and sat down in the back one before an office table on a hair-seated chair. It was a dingy place—not so dirty as it looked, I daresay. Even the windows, being of bad glass, did, I believe, look dirtier than they were. It was a place where, so far as the eye of an outsider could tell, much or nothing might be doing. Its occupant always wore his hat in it, and his hat always looked shabby. Some people said he was rich, others that he would be one day. Some said he was a responsible man, whatever the epithet may have been intended to mean. I believe he was quite as honest as the recognized laws of his trade demanded—and for how many could I say more? Nobody said he was avaricious—but then he moved amongst men whose very notion was first

to make money, after that to be religious, or to enjoy themselves, as the case might be. And no one either ever said of him that he was a good man, or a generous. He was about forty years of age, looking somehow as if he had never been younger. He had had a fair education—better than is generally considered necessary for mercantile purposes —but it would have been hard to discover any signs of it in the spending of his leisure. On Sunday mornings he went with his wife to church, and when he came home had a good dinner, of which now and then a friend took his share. If no stranger was present he took his wine by himself, and went to sleep in his easy chair of marone-coloured leather, while his wife sat on the other side of the fire if it was winter, or a little way off by the open window if it was summer, gently yawned now and then, and looked at him with eyes a little troubled. Then he went off again by the eight o'clock omnibus

on Monday morning, and not an idea more or less had he in his head, not a hair's-breadth of difference was there in his conduct or pursuits, that he had been to church and had spent the day out of business. That may, however, for anything I know, have been as much the clergyman's fault as his. He was the sort of man you might call machine-made, one in whom humanity, if in no wise caricatured, was yet in no wise ennobled.

His wife was ten years younger than he—hardly less than beautiful—only that over her countenance seemed to have gathered a kind of haze of commonness. At first sight, notwithstanding, one could not help perceiving that she was china and he was delft. She was graceful as she sat, long-necked, slope-shouldered, and quite as tall as her husband, with a marked daintiness about her in the absence of the extremes of the fashion, in the quality of the lace she wore on her black silk dress, and in the wide white sleeves of fine

cambric that covered her arms from the shoulder to the wrist. She had a morally delicate air, a look of scrupulous nicety and lavender-stored linen. She had long dark lashes; and when they rose, the eyelids revealed eyes of uncommon beauty. She had good features, good teeth, and a good complexion. The main feeling she produced and left was of ladyhood—little more.

Sunday afternoon came fifty-two times in the year. I mention this because then always, and nearly then only, could one calculate on seeing them together. It came to them in a surburb of London, and the look of it was dull. Doubtless Mr. Dempster's dinner and his repose after it were interesting to him, but I cannot help thinking his wife found it dreary. She had, however, got used to it. The house was a good old one, of red brick, much larger than they required, but not expensive, and had a general look of the refinement of its mistress. In the summer the

windows of the dining-room would generally be open, for they looked into a really lovely garden behind the house, and the scent of the jasmine that crept all around them would come in plentifully. I wonder what the scent of jasmine did in Duncan Dempster's world. Perhaps it never got farther than the general ante-chamber of the sensorium. It often made his wife sad—she could not tell why. To him I daresay it smelt agreeable, but I can hardly believe it ever woke in him that dreamy sensation it gave her—of something she had not had enough of, she could not say what. When the heat was gone off a little he would walk out on the lawn, which was well kept and well watered, with many flowering shrubs about it. Why he did so, I cannot tell. He looked at nothing in particular, only walked about for a few minutes, no doubt derived some pleasure of a mild nature from something, and walked in again to tea. One might have expected

he would have cultivated the acquaintance of his garden a little, if it were only for the pleasure the contrast would give him when he got back to his loved office, for a greater contrast could not well have been found than between his dingy dreary haunt on week-days—a place which nothing but duty could have made other than repugnant to any free soul—and this nest of greenery and light and odour. Sweet scents floated in clouds invisible about the place; flower eyes and stars and bells and bunches shone and glowed and lurked all around; his very feet might have learned a lesson of that which is beyond the sense from the turf he trod; but all the time, if he were not exactly seeing in his mind's eye the walls and tables of his office in the City square, his thoughts were not the less brooding over such business as he there transacted. For Mr. Dempster's was not a free soul. How could it be when all his energies were given to making money?

This he counted his *calling*—and I believe actually contrived to associate some feeling of duty with the notion of leaving behind him a plump round sum of money, as if money in accumulation and following flood, instead of money in peaceful current, were the good thing for the world! Hence the whole realm of real life, the universe of thought and growth, was a high-hedged park to him, within which he never even tried to look—not even knowing that he was shut out from it, for the hedge was of his own growing. What shall ever wake such a man to a sense of indwelling poverty, or make him begin to hunger after any lowliest expansion? Does a reader retort, "The man was comfortable, and why should he be troubled?" If the end of being, I answer, is only comfort in self, I yield. But what if there should be at the heart of the universe a Thought to which the being of such men is distasteful? What if to that Thought

they look blots in light, ugly things? May there not lie in that direction some possible reason why they should bethink themselves? Dempster, however, was not yet a clinker out of which all the life was burned, however much he looked like one. There was in him that which might yet burn—and give light and heat.

On the Sunday evenings Mrs. Dempster would have gladly gone to church again, if only—though to herself she never allowed this for one of her reasons—to slip from under the weight of her husband's presence. He seldom spoke to her more than a sentence at a time, but he did like to have her near him, and I suppose held, through the bare presence, some kind of dull one-sided communication with her; what did a woman know about business? and what did he know about except business? It is true he had a rudimentary pleasure in music—and would sometimes ask her to play to him, when he

would listen, and after his fashion enjoy. But although here was a gift that might be developed until his soul could echo the music of the spheres, the embodied souls of Handel or Mendelssohn were to him but clouds of sound wrapped about kernels—let me say of stock or bonds.

For a year or so after their marriage it had been the custom that, the first thing after breakfast on Monday morning, she should bring him her account-book, that they might together go over her week's expenses. She must cultivate the business habits in which, he said, he found her more than deficient. How could he endure in a wife what would have been preposterous in a clerk, and would have led to his immediate dismissal? It was in his eyes necessary that the same strict record of receipt and expenditure should be kept in the household as in the office; how else was one to know in what direction things were going? he said. He required of

his wife, therefore, that every individual thing that cost money, even to what she spent upon her own person, should be entered in her book. She had no money of her own, neither did he allow her any special sum for her private needs; but he made her a tolerably liberal weekly allowance, from which she had to pay everything except house-rent and taxes, an arrangement which I cannot believe a good one, as it will inevitably lead some conscientious wives to self-denial severer than necessary, and on the other hand will tempt the vulgar nature to make a purse for herself by mean savings off everybody else. It was especially distasteful to Mrs. Dempster to have to set down every little article of personal requirement that she bought. It would probably have seemed to her but a trifle had they both been young when they married, and had there been that tenderness of love between them which so soon sets everything more than right; but as

it was, she could never get over the feeling that the man was strange to her. As it was she would have got over this. But there was in her a certain constitutional lack of precision, combined with a want of energy and a weakness of will, that rendered her more than careless where her liking was not interested. Hence, while she would have been horrified at playing a wrong note or singing out of tune, she not only had no anxiety, for the thing's own sake, to have her accounts correct, but shrunk from every effort in that direction. Now I can perfectly understand her recoil from the whole affair, with her added dislike to the smallness of the thing required of her; but seeing she did begin with doing it after a fashion, it is not so easy to understand why, doing it, she should not make a consolation of doing it with absolute exactness. Not even her dread of her husband's dissatisfaction—which was by no means small—could prevail to make her, in-

stead of still trusting a memory that constantly played her false, put down a thing at once, nor postpone it to a far less convenient season. Hence it came that her accounts, though never much out, never balanced; and the weekly audit, while it grew more and more irksome to the one, grew more and more unsatisfactory to the other. For to Mr. Dempster's dusty eyes exactitude wore the robe of rectitude, and before long, precisely and merely from the continued unsatisfactory condition of her accounts, he began, in a hidden corner of his righteous soul, to reflect on the moral condition of his wife herself as unsatisfactory. Now such it certainly was, but he was not the man to judge it correctly, or to perceive the true significance of her failing. In business, while scrupulous as to the requirements of custom and recognized right, he nevertheless did things from which her soul would have recoiled like "the tender horns of

cockled snails;" yet it was to him not merely a strange and inexplicable fact that she should *never* be able to show to a penny, nay, often not to a shilling or eighteenpence, how the week's allowance went, but a painful one as indicating something beyond perversity. And truly it was no very hard task he required of her, for, seeing they had no children, only three servants, and saw little company, her housekeeping could not be a very heavy or involved affair. Perhaps if it had been more difficult she would have done it better, but anyhow she hated the whole thing, procrastinated, and setting down several things together, was *sure* to forget some article or mistake some price; yet not one atom more would she distrust her memory the next time she was tempted. But it was a small fault at worst, and if her husband had loved her enough to understand the bearings of it in relation to her mental and moral condition he would have tried to content himself

that at least she did not exceed her allowance; and would of all things have avoided making such a matter a burden upon the consciousness of one so differently educated, if not constituted, from himself. It is but fair to add on the other side that, if she had loved him after anything like a wifely ideal, which I confess was not yet possible to her, it would not have been many weeks before she had a first correct account to show him. Convinced, at length, that accuracy was not to be had from her, and satisfying himself with dissatisfaction, he one morning threw from him the little ruled book, and declared, in a wrath which he sought to smother into dignified but hopeless rebuke, that he would trouble himself with her no further. She burst into tears, took up the book, left the room, cried a little, resolved to astonish him the next Monday, and never set down another item. When it came, and breakfast was over, he gave her the usual cheque, and left

at once for town. Nor had the accounts ever again been alluded to between them.

Now this might have been very well, or at least not very ill, if both had done tolerably well thereafter—that is, if the one had continued to attend to her expenditure as well as before, and the other, when he threw away the account-book, had dismissed from his mind the whole matter. But Dempster was one of those dangerous men—more dangerous, however, to themselves than to others—who never forget, that is, get over, an offence or disappointment. They respect themselves so much, and, out of their respect for themselves, build so much upon success, set so much by never being defeated but always gaining their point, that when they are driven to confess themselves foiled, the confession is made from the "poor dumb mouth" of a wound that cannot be healed. It is there for ever—will be there at least until they find another God to worship than

their own paltry selves. Hence it came that the bourn between the two spiritual estates yawned a little wider at one point, and a mist of dissatisfaction would not unfrequently rise from a certain stagnant pool in its hollow. The cause was paltry in one sense, but nothing to which belongs the name of *Cause* can fail to mingle the element of awfulness even with its paltriness. Its worst effect was that it hindered approximation in other parts of their marching natures.

And as to Mrs. Dempster, I am sorry for the apparent justification which what I have to confess concerning her must give to the severe whims of such husbands as hers: from that very Monday morning she began to grow a little careless about her expenditure —which she had never been before. By degrees bill after bill was allowed to filch from the provision of the following week, and when that was devoured, then from that of the week after. It was not that she was in

the least more expensive upon herself, or that she consciously wasted anything; but, altogether averse to housekeeping, she ceased to exercise the same outlook upon the expenditure of the house, did not keep her horses together, left the management more and more to her cook; while the consciousness that she was not doing her duty made her more and more uncomfortable, and the knowledge that things were going farther and farther wrong, made her hate the idea of accounts worse and worse, until she came at length to regard them with such a loathing as might have fitted some extreme of moral evil. The bills which were supposed by her husband to be regularly settled every week were at last months behind, and the week's money spent in meeting the most pressing of its demands, while what it could no longer cover was cast upon the growing heap of evil for the time to come.

I must say this for her, however, that

there was a small sum of money she expected on the death of a crazy aunt, which, if she could but lay hold of it without her husband's knowledge, she meant to devote to the clearing off of everything, when she vowed to herself to do better in the time to come.

The worst thing in it all was that her fear of her husband kept increasing, and that she felt more and more uncomfortable in his presence. Hence that troubled look in her eye, always more marked when her husband sat dozing in his chair of a Sunday afternoon.

It was natural, too, that, although they never quarrelled, their intercourse should not grow of a more tender character. Seldom was there a salient point in their few scattered sentences of conversation, except, indeed, it were some piece of news either had to communicate. Occasionally the wife read something from the newspaper, but never

except at her husband's request. In general he enjoyed his newspaper over a chop at his office. Two or three times since their marriage—now eight years—he had made a transient resolve pointing at the improvement of her mind, and to that end had taken from his great glass-armoured bookcase some *standard* work—invariably, I believe, upon party-politics—from which he had made her read him a chapter. But, unhappily, she had always got to the end of it without gaining the slightest glimmer of a true notion of what the author was driving at.

It almost moves me to pity to think of the vagueness of that rudimentary humanity in Mr. Dempster which made him dream of doing something to improve his wife's mind. What did he ever do to improve his own? It is hard to understand how horses find themselves so comfortable in their stables that, be the day ever so fine, the country ever so lovely, the air ever so exhilarating,

they are always rejoiced to get back into their dull twilight: it is harder to me to understand how Mr. Dempster could be so comfortable in his own mind that he never wanted to get out of it, even at the risk of being beside himself; but no doubt the dimness of its twilight had a good deal to do with his content. And then there is that in every human mind which no man's neighbour, nay, no man himself, can understand. My neighbour may in his turn be regarding my mind as a gloomy place to live in, while I find it no undesirable residence—though chiefly because of the number of windows it affords me for looking out of it. Still, if Dempster's dingy office in the City was not altogether a sufficing type of the mind that used it, I consider it a very fairly good one.

But wherein was Mrs. Dempster so very different from her husband as I rudely fancy some of my readers imagining her? What-

ever may have been her reasons for marrying him — one would suppose they must have been weighty—to do so she must have been in a very undeveloped condition, and in that condition she still remained. I do not mean that she was less developed than ninty-nine out of the hundred: most women affect me only as valuable crude material out of which precious things are making. How much they might be, must be, shall be! For now they stand like so many Lot's-wives—so many rough-hewn marble blocks, rather, of which a Divinity is shaping the ends. Mrs. Dempster had all the making of a lovely woman, but notwithstanding her grace, her beauty, her sweetness, her lark-like ballading too, she was a very ordinary woman in that region of her which knew what she meant when she said "I." Of this fact she had hardly a suspicion, however; for until aspiration brings humility, people are generally pretty well satisfied with themselves, having

no idea what poor creatures they are. She saw in her mirror a superior woman, regarded herself as one of the finer works of creation. The worst was that from the first she had counted herself superior to her husband, and in marrying him had felt not merely that she was conferring a favour, which every husband would allow, but that she was lowering herself without elevating him. Now it is true that she was pleasanter to look at, that her manners were sweeter, and her notions of the becoming far less easily satisfied than his; also that she was a little less deficient in vague reverence for certain forms of the higher than he. But I know of nothing in her to determine her classification as of greater value than he, except indeed that she was on the whole rather more honest. She read novels and he did not; she passed shallow judgment, where he scorned to judge; she read all the middling poetry that came in her way, and copied

books full of it; but she could no more have appreciated one of Milton's or Shakspere's smallest poems than she could have laughed over a page of Chinese. She liked to hear this and that popular preacher, and when her husband called his sermons humbug, she heard it with a shocked countenance; but was she better or worse than her husband when, admiring them as she did, she permitted them to have no more influence upon her conduct than if they had been the merest humbug ever uttered by ambitious demagogue? In truth, I cannot see that in the matter of worth there was much as yet to choose between them.

It is hardly necessary, then, to say that there was little appreciable approximation of any kind going on between them. If only they would have read Dickens together! Who knows what might have come of it! But this dull close animal proximity, without the smallest conscious nearness of heart or

mind or soul—and so little chance, from very lack of wants, for showing each other kindnesses—surely it is a killing sort of thing! And yet, and yet, there is always a something—call it habit, or any poorest name you please—grows up between two who are much together, at least when they neither quarrel nor thwart each other's designs, which, tending with its roots towards the deeper human, blossoms into—a wretched little flower indeed, yet afar off partaking of the nature of love. The Something seldom reveals its existence until they are parted. I suspect that with not a few, Death is the love-messenger at the stroke of whose dart the stream of love first begins to flow in the selfish bosom.

It is now necessary to mention a little break in the monotony of Mrs. Dempster's life, which, but for what came afterwards, could claim no record. One morning her page announced Major Strong, and possibly

she received the gentleman who entered with a brighter face than she had ever shown her husband. The major had just arrived from India. He had been much at her father's house while she was yet a mere girl, being then engaged to one of her sisters, who died after he went abroad, and before he could return to marry her. He was now a widower, a fine-looking, frank, manly fellow. The expression of his countenance was little altered, and the sight of him revived in the memory of Mrs. Dempster many recollections of a happy girlhood, when the prospect of such a life as she now led with tolerable content would have seemed simply unendurable. When her husband came home she told him as much as he cared to hear of the visitor she had had, and he made no objection to her asking him to dine the next Sunday. When he arrived Mr. Dempster saw a man of his own age, bronzed and big, with not much waist left, but a good carriage and

pleasant face. He made himself agreeable at dinner, appreciated his host's wine, and told good stories that pleased the business man as showing that he knew "what was what." He accorded him his more particular approval, speaking to his wife, on the ground that he was a man of the world, with none of the army slang about him. Mr. Dempster was not aware that he had himself more business peculiarities than any officer in her majesty's service had military ones.

After this Major Strong frequently called upon Mrs. Dempster. They were good friends, and did each other no harm whatever, and the husband neither showed nor felt the least jealousy. They sang together, occasionally went out shopping, and three or four times went together to the play. Mr. Dempster, so long as he had his usual comforts, did not pine in his wife's absence, but did show a little more pleasure when she came home to him than usually when he

came home to her. This lasted for a few months. Then the major went back to India, and for a time the lady missed him a good deal, which, considering the dulness of her life, was not very surprising or reprehensible.

CHAPTER II.

AN ASTONISHMENT.

Now comes the strange part of my story.

One evening the housemaid opened the door to Mr. Dempster on his return from the city; and perhaps the fact that it was the maid, and not the page as usual, roused his observation, which, except in business matters, was not remarkably operative. He glanced at the young woman, when an eye far less keen than his could not have failed to remark a strangely excited expression on her countenance.

"Where is the boy?" he asked.

"Just run to the doctor's, sir," she answered.

Then first he remembered that when he left in the morning his wife had not been

feeling altogether well, but he had never thought of her since.

"How is your mistress?" he said.

"She's rather poorly, sir, but—but—she's as well as could be expected."

"What does the fool mean?" said Dempster to himself, and very nearly said it aloud, for he was not over polite to any in his service. But he did not say it aloud. He advanced into the hall with deliberation, and made for the stair.

"Oh, please sir," the maid cried in a tone of perturbation, when, turning from shutting the door, she saw his intention, "you can't go up to mis'ess's room just at this minute, sir. Please go in the dining-room, sir."

"What do you mean?" he asked, turning angrily upon the girl, for of all things he hated mystery.

Like every one else in the house, and office both, she stood in awe of him, and his look frightened her.

"Please go in the dining-room," she gasped entreatingly.

"What!" he said and did turn towards the dining-room, "is your mistress so ill she can't see me?"

"Oh, no, sir!—at least I don't know exactly. Cook's with her, sir. She's over the worst, anyhow."

"What on earth do you mean, girl? Speak out, will you? What is the matter with your mistress?"

As he spoke he stepped into the room, the maid following him. The same moment he spied a whitish bundle of something on the rug in front of the fire.

"What do you mean by leaving things like that in the dining-room?" he went on more angrily still.

"Please, sir," answered the girl, going and lifting the bundle carefully, "it's the baby!"

"The baby!" shouted Mr. Dempster, and looked at her from head to foot. "What

baby?" Then bethinking himself that it must belong to some visitor in the drawing-room with his wife, he moderated his tone. "Make haste; take it away!" he said. "I don't want babies here! There's a time and a place for everything!—What *are* you about?"

For, instead of obeying her master and taking it away, the maid was carefully looking in the blanket for the baby. Having found it and turned aside the covering from its face, she came nearer, and holding up the little vision, about the size and colour of a roll of red wax taper, said:—

"Look at it, sir! It's your own, and worth looking at."

Never before had she dared speak to him so!

I will not venture to assert that Mr. Dempster turned white, but his countenance changed, and he dropped into the chair behind him, feeling less of a business man

than had been his consciousness for the last twenty years. He was hit hard. The absolutely Incredible had hit him. Babies might be born in a day, but surely not without previous preparation on the part of nature at least, if not on that of the mother; and in this case if the mother had prepared herself, certainly she had not prepared him for the event. It was as if the treasure of Nature's germens were tumbling all together. His head swam. He could not speak a word.

"Yes, sir," the maid went on, relieved of her trepidation in perceiving that her master too was mortal, and that her word had such power over him—proud also of knowing more of his concerns than he did himself, "she was took about an hour and a half ago. We've kep' sendin' an' sendin' after the doctor, but he ain't never been yet; only cook, she knows a deal an' she says she's been very bad, sir. But the young

gentleman come at last, bless him! and now she's doin' as well as could be expected, sir—cook says."

"God bless me!" said the astonished father, and relapsed into the silence of bewilderment.

Eight years married with never a glimmer of offspring—and now, all at once, and without a whisper of warning, the father of a "young gentleman!" How could it be other than perplexing—discomposing, indeed!—yet it was right pleasant too. Only it would have been more pleasant if experience could have justified the affair! Nature—no, not Nature—or, if Nature, then Nature sure in some unnatural mood, had stolen a march upon him, had gone contrary to all that had ever been revealed of her doings before! and why had she pitched on him—just him, Duncan Dempster, to exercise one of her more grotesque and wayward moods upon? —to play at hide-and-seek with after this

fashion? She had not treated him with exactly proper respect, he thought, or, rather vaguely felt.

"Business is business," he remarked, under his breath, "and this cannot be called proper business behaviour. What is there about me to make game of? Really, my wife ought——"

What his wife ought or ought not to have done, however, had not yet made itself clear to him, and his endeavour to excogitate being in that direction broken off, gave way to the pleasure of knowing himself a father, or perhaps more truly of having an heir. In the strength of it he rose, went to the cellaret, and poured himself out a glass of his favourite port, which he sat down to drink in silence and meditation. He was rather a picture just then and there, though not a very lovely one, seated, with his hat still on his head, in the middle of the room, upon a chair half-way between the dining-table and

the sideboard, with his glass of wine in his hand. He was pondering partly the pleasure, but still mainly the peculiarity of his position. A bishop once told me that, shortly after he had been raised to the episcopal dignity, a friend's horses, whose driver had tumbled off the box drunk, ran away with him, and upset the carriage. He crept out of the window over his head, and the first thought that came to him as he sat perched on the side of the carriage, while it was jumbled along by the maddened horses, was, "What do bishops do in such circumstances?" Equally perplexing was the question Dempster had to ask himself: how husbands who, after being married eight years, suddenly and unexpectedly received the gift of a first-born, were in the habit of comporting themselves! He poured himself out another glass, and with it came the reflection, both amusing and consoling, that his brother, who was confidently expecting his tidy five figures to

crown the earthly bliss of one or more of his large family some day, would be equally but less agreeably surprised. "Serve him right!" he said to himself. "What business have they to be looking out for my death?" And for a moment the heavens appeared a little more just than he was ordinarily in the habit of regarding them. He said to himself he would work harder than ever now. There would now be some good in making money! He had never given his mind to it yet, he said: now the world should see what he could do when he did give his mind to it!

Hitherto gathering had been his main pleasure, but with the thought of his money would now not seldom be mingled the thought of the little thing in the blanket! He began to find himself strangely happy. I use the wrong phrase—for the fact is, he had never yet found himself at all; he knew nothing of the person except a self-painted and immensely flattered portrait that hung

in the innermost chamber of his heart—I mean the innermost chamber he knew anything of: there were many chambers there of which he did not even know the doors. Yet a few minutes as he sat there, and he was actually cherishing a little pride in the wife who had done so much better for him than he had at length come to expect. If not a good accountant, she was at least a good wife, and a very fair housekeeper: he had no doubt she would prove a good mother. He would gladly have gone to her at once, to let her know how much he was pleased with her behaviour. As for that little bit of red clay—"terra cotta," he called it to himself, as he looked round with a smile at the blanket, which the housemaid had replaced on the rug before the fire—who could imagine him a potentate upon 'Change—perhaps in time a director of European affairs! He was not in the way of joking—of all things about money; the very thought of business filled

him from top to toe with seriousness; but he did make that small joke, and accompany it with a grim smile.

He was startled from his musing by the entrance of the doctor, who had in the meantime arrived and seen the lady, and now came to look at the baby. He congratulated Mr. Dempster on having at length a son and heir, but warned him that his wife was far from being beyond danger yet. The whole thing was entirely out of the common, he said, and she must be taken the greatest possible care of. The words woke a gentle pity in the heart of the man, for by nature all men have some tenderness for women in such circumstances, but they did not trouble him greatly—for such dangers belonged to their calling, their *business* in life, and, doubtless, if she had attended to that business earlier she would have found it easier.

"Did you ever know such a thing before, doctor?" he asked, with the importance of

one honoured by a personal visit from the Marvellous.

"Never in my own practice," answered the doctor, whom the cook had instructed in the wonders of the case, "but I have read of such a thing." And Mr. Dempster swelled like a turkey-cock.

It was several days before he was allowed to see the mother. Perhaps had she expressed a strong desire to see him, it might have been risked sooner, but she had neither expressed nor manifested any. He kissed her, spoke a few stupid words in a kind tone, asking her how she did, but paying no heed to her answer, and turned aside to look at the baby.

Mrs. Dempster recovered but slowly, and not very satisfactorily. She did not seem to care much about the child. She tried to nurse him, but was not very successful. She took him when the nurse brought him, and yielded him again with the same indif-

ference, showing neither pleasure to receive nor unwillingness to part with him. The nurse did not fail to observe it and remark upon it: *she* had never seen a mother care so little for her child! there was little of the mother in *her* any way! it was no wonder she was so long about it. It troubled the father a little that she should not care for his child: some slight fermentation had commenced in the seemingly dead mass of human affection that had lain so long neglected in his being, and it seemed strange to him that, while he was living for the child in the City, she should be so indifferent to him at home. For already he had begun to keep his vow, already his greater keenness in business was remarked in the City. But it boded little good for either that the gift of God should stir up in him the worship of Mammon. More sons are damned by their fathers' money than by anything else whatever outside of themselves.

There was the excuse to be made for Mrs. Dempster that she continued far from strong —and her husband made it: he would have made it more heartily if he had himself ever in his life known what it was to be ill. By degrees she grew stronger, however, until, to persons who had not known her before, she would have seemed in tolerable health. For a week or two after she was again going about the house, she continued to nurse the baby, but after that she became unable to do so, and therewith began to neglect him entirely. She never asked to see him, and when the nurse brought him would turn her head aside, and tell her to take it away. So far from his being a pleasure to her, the very sight of the child brought the hot dew upon her forehead. Her husband frowned and wondered, but, unaccustomed to open his mind either to her or to any one else, not unwisely sought to understand the thing before speaking of it, and in the meantime

commenced a genuine attempt to make up to the baby for his mother's neglect. Almost without a notion how even to take him in his arms, he would now send for him the moment he had had his tea, and after a fashion, ludicrous in the eyes of the nurse, would dandle and caress him, and strut about with him before his wife, glancing up at her every now and then, to point the lesson that such was the manner in which a parent ought to behave to a child. In his presence she never made any active show of her dislike, but her look seemed all the time fixed on something far away, as if she had nothing to do with the affair.

CHAPTER III.

ANOTHER ASTONISHMENT.

But a second and very different astonishment awaited Mr. Dempster. Again one evening, on his return from the City, he saw a strange look on the face of the girl who opened the door—but this time it was a look of fear.

"Well?" he said, in a tone at once alarmed and peremptory.

She made no answer, but turned whiter than before.

"Where is your mistress?" he demanded.

"Nobody knows, sir," she answered.

"Nobody knows! What would you have me understand by such an answer?"

"It's the bare truth, sir. Nobody knows where she is."

"God bless me!" cried the husband. "What does it all mean?"

And again he sunk down upon a chair—this time in the hall, and stared at the girl as if waiting further enlightenment.

But there was little enough to be had. Only one point was clear: his wife was nowhere to be found. He sent for every one in the house, and cross-questioned each to discover the last occasion on which she had been seen. It was some time since she had been missed; how long before that she had been seen there was no certainty to be had. He ran to the doctor, then from one to another of her acquaintance, then to her mother, who lived on the opposite side of London. She, like the rest, could tell him nothing. In her anxiety she would have gone back with him, but he was surly, and would not allow her. It was getting towards

morning before he reached home, but no relieving news awaited him. What to think was as much a perplexity to him as what to do. He was not in the agony in which a man would have been who thoroughly loved his wife, but he cared enough about her to feel uncomfortable; and the cries of the child, who was suffering from some ailment, made him miserable: in his perplexity and dull sense of helplessness he wondered whether she might not have given the baby poison before she went. Then the thing would make such a talk! and, of all things, Duncan Dempster hated being talked about. How busy people's brains would be with all his affairs! How many explanations of the mystery would be suggested on 'Change! Some would say, "What business had a man like him with a fine lady for a wife? one so much younger than himself too!" He could remember making the same remark of another, before he was married. "Served him right!"

they would say. And with that the first movement of suspicion awoke in him—purely and solely from his own mind's reflection of the imagined minds of others. While in his mind's ear he heard them talking, almost before he knew what they meant the words came to him: "There was that Major Strong, you know!"

"She's gone to him!" he cried aloud, and, springing from the bed on which he had thrown himself, he paced the chamber in a fury. He had no word for it but hers that he was now in India! They had only been waiting till—By heaven, that child was none of his! And therewith rushed into his mind the conviction that everything was thus explained. No man ever yet entertained an unhappy suspicion, but straightway an army of proofs positive came crowding to the service of the lie. It is astounding with what manifest probability everything will fall in to prove that a fact which has no

foundation whatever! There is no end to the perfection with which a man may fool himself while taking absolute precautions against being fooled by others. Every fact, being a living fact, has endless sides and relations; but of all these, the man whose being hangs upon one thought, will see only those sides and relations which fall in with that thought. Dempster even recalled the words of the maid, "It's mis'ess's," as embodying the girl's belief that it was not master's. Where a man, whether by nature jealous or not, is in a jealous condition, there is no need of an Iago to parade before him the proofs of his wrong. It was because Shakespere would neither have Desdemona less than perfect, nor Othello other than the most trusting and least suspicious of men, that he had to invent an all but incredible villain to effect the needful catastrophe.

But why should a man, who has cared so little for his wife, become instantly, upon the

bare suspicion, so utter a prey to consuming misery? There was a character in his suffering which could not be attributed to any degree of anger, shame, or dread of ridicule. The truth was, there lay in his being a possibility of love to his wife far beyond anything his miserably stunted consciousness had an idea of; and the conviction of her faithlessness now wrought upon him in the office of Death, to let him know what he had lost. It magnified her beauty in his eyes, her gentleness, her grace; and he thought with a pang how little he had made of her or it.

But the next moment wrath at the idea of another man's child being imposed upon him as his, with the consequent loss of his precious money, swept every other feeling before it. For by law the child was his, whoever might be the father of it. During a whole minute he felt on the point of tying a stone about its neck, carrying it out, and throwing it into the river Lea. Then, with

the laugh of a hyena, he set about arranging in his mind the proofs of her guilt. First came eight childless years with himself; next the concealment of her condition, and the absurd pretence that she had known nothing of it; then the trouble of mind into which she had fallen; then her strange unnatural aversion to her own child; and now, last of all, conclusive of a guilty conscience, her flight from his house. He would give himself no trouble to find her; why should he search after his own shame! He would neither attempt to conceal nor to explain the fact that she had left him—people might say what they pleased—try him for murder if they liked! As to the child she had so kindly left to console him for her absence, he would not drown him, neither would he bring him up in his house; he would give him an ordinary education, and apprentice him to a trade. For his money, he would leave it to a hospital—a rich one, able to defend his

will if disputed. For what was the child? A monster—a creature that had no right to existence!

Not one of those who knew him best would have believed him capable of being so moved, nor did one of them now know it, for he hid his suffering with the success of a man not unaccustomed to make a mask of his face. There are not a few men who, except something of the nature of a catastrophe befall them, will pass through life without having or affording a suspicion of what is in them. Everything hitherto had tended to suppress the live elements of Duncan Dempster; but now, like the fire of a volcano in a land of ice, the vitality in him had begun to show itself.

Sheer weariness drove him, as the morning began to break, to lie down again; but he neither undressed nor slept, and rose at his usual hour. When he entered the dining-room, where breakfast was laid as usual—

only for one instead of two—he found by his plate, among letters addressed to his wife, a packet directed to himself. It had not been through the post, and the address was in his wife's hand. He opened it. A sheet of paper was wrapped around a roll of unpaid butcher's bills, amounting to something like eighty pounds, and a note from the butcher craving immediate settlement. On the sheet of paper was written, also in his wife's hand, these words: "I am quite unworthy of being your wife any longer;" that was all.

Now here, to a man who had loved her enough to understand her, was a clue to the whole — to Dempster it was the strongest possible confirmation of what he had already concluded. To him it appeared as certain as anything he called truth, that for years, while keeping a fair face to her husband—a man who had never refused her anything—he did not recall the fact that almost never had she asked or he offered anything—she

had been deceiving him, spending money she would not account for, pretending to pay everything when she had been ruining his credit with the neighbourhood, making him, a far richer man than any but himself knew, appear to be living beyond his means, when he was every month investing far more than he spent. It was injury upon injury! Then, as a last mark of her contempt, she had taken pains that these beggarly butcher's bills should reach him from her own hand! He would trouble himself about such a woman not a moment longer!

He went from breakfast to his omnibus as usual, walked straight to his office, and spent the day according to custom. I need hardly say that the first thing he did was to write a cheque for the butcher. He made no further inquiry after her whatever, nor was any made of him there, for scarcely one of the people with whom he did business had been to his house, or had even seen his wife.

In the suburb where he lived it was different; but he paid no heed to any inquiry, beyond saying he knew nothing about her. To her relatives he said that if they wanted her they might find her for themselves. She had gone to please herself, and he was not going to ruin himself by running about the world after her.

Night after night he came home to his desolate house; took no comfort from his child; made no confession that he stood in need of comfort. But he had a dull sensation as if the sun had forsaken the world, and an endless night had begun. The simile, of course, is mine—the sensation only was his; *he* could never have expressed anything that went on in the region wherein men suffer.

A few days made a marked difference in his appearance. He was a hard man; but not so hard as people had thought him; and besides, *no* man can rule his own spirit

except he has the spirit of right on his side; neither is any man proof against the inroads of good. Even Lady Macbeth was defeated by the imagination she had braved. Add to this, that no man can, even by those who understand him best, be labelled as a box containing such and such elements, for the humanity in him is deeper than any individuality, and may manifest itself at some crisis in a way altogether beside expectation.

His feeling was not at first of an elevated kind. After the grinding wrath had abated, self-pity came largely to the surface—not by any means a grand emotion, though very dear to boys and girls in their first consciousness of self, and in them pardonable enough. On the same ground it must be pardoned in a man who, with all his experience of the world, was more ignorant of the region of emotion, and more undeveloped morally, than multitudes of children: in him it was an indication that the shell was beginning to

break. He said to himself that he was old beside her, and that she had begun to weary of him, and despise him. Gradually upon this, however, supervened at intervals a faint shadow of pity for her who could not have been happy or she would not have left him.

Days and weeks passed, and there was no sign of Mrs. Dempster. The child was not sent out to nurse, and throve well enough. His father never took the least notice of him.

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT IT MEANT.

SOME of my readers, perhaps all of them, will have concluded that Mrs. Dempster was a little out of her mind. Such, indeed, was the fact, and one not greatly to be wondered at, after such a peculiar experience as she had had. Some small degree of congestion, and the consequent pressure on some portion of the brain, had sent certain faculties to sleep, and, perhaps, roused others into morbid activity. That it is impossible to tell where sanity ends and insanity begins, is a trite remark indeed; but like many things which it is useless to say, it has the more need to be thought of. If I yield to an impulse of

which I know I shall be ashamed, is it not the act of a madman? And may not the act lead to a habit, and at length to a despised, perhaps feared and hated, old age, twisting at the ragged ends of a miserable life?

However certain it is that mental disorder had to do with Mrs. Dempster's departure from her home, it is almost as certain she would never have gone had it not been for the unpaid bills haunting her consciousness, a combination of demon and ghost. The misery had all the time been growing upon her, and must have had no small share in the subversion of her microcosm. When that was effected, the evil thing that lay at the root of it all rose and pounced upon her. Wrong is its own avenger. She had been doing wrong, and knowingly for years, and now the plant of evil was blossoming towards its fruit. If one say the evil was but a trifle, I take her judgment, not his, upon that. She

had been lazy towards duty, had persistently turned aside from what she knew to be her business, until she dared not even look at it. And now that the crisis was at hand, as omened by that letter from the butcher, with the sense of her wrong-doing was mingled the terror of her husband. What would he think, say, and do? Not yet had she, after all these years, any deep insight into his character; else perhaps she might have read there that, much as he loved money, the pleasure of seeing signal failure follow the neglect of his instructions would quite compensate him for the loss. What the bills amounted to, she had not an idea. Not until she had made up her mind to leave her home could she muster the courage to get them together. Then she even counted up the total and set down the sum in her memory—which sum thereafter haunted her like the name of her devil.

As to the making up of her mind—she

could remember very little of that process—or indeed of the turning of her resolve into action. She left the house in the plainest dress her wardrobe could afford her, and with just one half-crown in her pocket. Her design was to seek a situation, as a refuge from her husband and his wrath. It was a curious thing, that, while it gave her no trouble to leave her baby, whom indeed she had not that day seen, and to whom for some time she had ceased to be necessary, her only notion was to get a place as nurse.

At that time, I presume, there were few or no such offices for engaging servants as are now common; at all events, the plan Mrs. Dempster took, when she had reached a part of London she judged sufficiently distant for her purpose, was to go from shop to shop inquiring after a situation. But she met with no prospect of success, and at last, greatly in need of rest and refreshment, went into a small coffee shop. The woman who

kept it was taken by her appearance, her manners, and her evident trouble, and, happening to have heard of a lady who wanted a nurse, gave her the address. She went at once, and applied for the place. The lady was much pleased with her, and agreed to take her, provided she received a satisfactory character of her. For such a demand Mrs. Dempster was unprepared; she had never thought what reference she could give, and her resources for deception easily exhausted, gave, driven to extremity, the name and address of her mother. So met the extremes of loss and salvation! She returned to the coffee shop, and the lady wrote at once to the address of the young woman's late mistress, as she supposed.

The kindness of her new friend was not exhausted; she gave her a share of her own bed that night. Mrs. Dempster had now but two shillings, which she offered her, promising her the rest out of the first wages

she received. But the good woman would take no more than one of them, and that in full payment of what she owed her, and Mrs. Dempster left the shop in tears, to linger about the neighbourhood until the hour should arrive at which the lady had told her to call again. Apparently she must have cherished the hope that her mother, divining her extremity, would give her the character she could honestly claim. But as she drew near the door which she hoped would prove a refuge, her mother was approaching it also, and at the turning of a corner they ran into each other's arms. The elderly lady had a hackney coach waiting for her in the next street, and Mrs. Dempster, too tired to resist, got into it at once at her mother's desire. Ere they reached the mother's house, which, as I have said, was a long way from Mr. Dempster's, the daughter told everything, and the mother had perceived more than the daughter could tell: her eyes had revealed

that all was not right behind them. She soothed her as none but a mother can, easily persuading her she would make everything right, and undertaking herself to pay the money owing to the butcher. But it was soon evident that for the present there must be no suggestion of her going back to her husband; for, imagining from something, that her mother was taking her to him, she jumped up and had all but opened the door of the cab when her mother succeeded in mastering her. As soon as she was persuaded that such had never been the intention, she was quiet. When they reached the house she was easily induced to go to bed at once.

Her mother lived in a very humble way, with one servant, a trustworthy woman. To her she confided the whole story, and with her consulted as to what had better be done. Between them they resolved to keep her, for a while at least, in retirement and silence.

To this conclusion they came on the following grounds: First, the daughter's terror and the mother's own fear of Mr. Dempster; next, it must be confessed, the resentment of both mistress and servant because of his rudeness when he came to inquire after her; third, the evident condition of the poor creature's mind; and last, the longing of the two women to have her to themselves, that they might nurse and cosset her to their hearts' content.

They were to have more of this indulgence, however, than, for her sake, they would have desired, for before morning she was very ill. She had brain fever, in fact, and they had their hands full, especially as they desired to take every precaution to prevent the neighbourhood from knowing there was any one but themselves in the house.

It was a severe attack, but she passed the crisis favourably, and began to recover. One morning, after a quieter night than usual, she called her mother, and told her she had

had a strange dream—that she had a baby somewhere, but could not find him, and was wandering about looking for him.

"Wasn't it a curious dream, mamma?" she said. "I wish it were a true one. I knew exactly what my baby was like, and went into house after house full of children, sure that I could pick him out of thousands. I was just going up to the door of the Foundling Hospital to look for him there when I woke."

As she ceased, a strange trouble passed like a cloud over her forehead and eyes, and her hand, worn almost transparent by the fever, followed it over forehead and eyes. She seemed trying to recall something forgotten. But her mother thought it better to say nothing.

Each of the two nights following she had the same dream.

"Three times, mother," she said. "I am not superstitious, as you know, but I can't

help feeling as if it must mean something. I don't know what to make of it else—except it be that I haven't got over the fever yet. And, indeed, I am afraid my head is not quite right, for I can't be sure sometimes, such a hold has my dream of me, that I haven't got a baby somewhere about the world. Give me your hand, mother, and sing to me."

Still her mother thought it more prudent to say nothing, and do what she could to divert her thoughts; for she judged it must be better to let her brain come right, as it were, of itself.

In the middle of the next night she woke her with a cry.

"O, mother, mother! I know it all now. I am not out of my mind any more. How I came here I cannot tell—but I know I have a husband and a baby at Hackney—and—oh, such a horrible roll of butcher's bills!"

"Yes, yes, my dear! I know all about it,"

answered her mother. "But never mind; you can pay them all yourself now, for I heard only yesterday that your aunt Lucy is dead, and has left you the hundred pounds she promised you twenty years ago."

"Oh, bless her!" cried Mrs. Dempster, springing out of bed, much to the dismay of her mother, who boded a return of the fever. "I must go home to my baby at once. But tell me all about it, mamma. How did I come here? I seem to remember being in a carriage with you, and that is the last I know."

Then, upon condition that she got into bed at once, and promised not to move until she gave her leave, her mother consented to tell her all she knew. She listened in silence, with face flushed and eyes glowing, but drank a cooling draught, lay down again, and at daybreak was fast asleep. When she awoke she was herself again.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT CAME OF IT.

MEANTIME, things were going, as they should, in rather a dull fashion with Duncan Dempster. His chariot wheels were gone, and he drove heavily. The weather was good; he seldom failed of the box-seat on the omnibus; a ray of light, the first he had ever seen there, visited his table, reflected from a new window on the opposite side of a court into the heart of his dismal back office; and best of all, business was better than usual. Yet was Dempster not cheerful. He was not, indeed, a man an acquaintance would ever have thought of calling cheerful; but in grays there are gradations; and however differently

a man's barometer may be set from those of other people, it has its ups and downs, its fair weather and foul. But not yet had he an idea how much his mental equilibrium had been dependent upon the dim consciousness of having that quiet uninterested wife in the comfortable house at Hackney. It had been stronger than it seemed, the spidery, invisible line connecting that office and that house, along which had run twice a day the hard dumpling that dwelt in Mr. Dempster's bosom. Vaguely connected with that home after all must have been that endless careful gathering of treasure in the city; for now, though he could no more stop making money than he could stop breathing, it had not the same interest as formerly. Indeed, he had less interest than before in keeping his lungs themselves going. But he kept on doing everything as usual.

Not one of the men he met ever said a word to him about his wife. The general impres-

sion was that she had left him for preferable society, and no one wondered at her throwing aside such "a dry old stick," whom even the devoted slaves of business contemned as having nothing in him but business.

A further change was, however, in progress within him. The first sign of it was that he began to doubt whether his wife had indeed been false to him—had forsaken him in any other company than that of Death. But there was one great difficulty in the way of the conclusion. It was impossible for him to imagine suicide as proceeding from any cause but insanity, and what could have produced the disorder in one who had no cares or anxieties, everything she wanted, and nothing to trouble her, a devoted husband, and a happy home? Yet the mere idea made him think more pitifully, and so more tenderly of her than before. It had not yet occurred to him to consider whether he might not have had something to do with her con-

duct or condition. Blame was a thing he had never made acquaintance with—least of all in the form of self-blame. To himself he was simply all right—the poised centre of things capable of righteous judgment on every one else. But it must not be forgotten how little he knew about his own affairs at all; his was a very different condition from that of one who had closed his eyes and hardened his heart to suspicions concerning himself. His eyes had never yet been opened to anything but the order of things in the money world—its laws, its penalties, its rewards—those he did understand. But apparently he was worth troubling. A slow dissatisfaction was now preying upon him—a sense of want—of not having something he once had, a vague discomfort, growing restless. This feeling was no doubt the worse that the birth of the child had brought such a sudden rush of fresh interest into his occupation, which doubt concerning that

birth had again so suddenly checked; but even if the child should prove after all his own, a supposition he was now willing to admit as possibly a true one, he could never without his mother feel any enthusiasm about him, even such enthusiasm as might be allowed to a man who knew money from moonshine, and common sense from hysterics. Yet once and again, about this time, the nurse coming into the room after a few minutes' absence, found him bending over the sleeping infant, and, as she described him, "looking as if he would have cried if he had only known how."

One frosty evening in late autumn the forsaken husband came from London—I doubt if he would now have said "home"—as usual, on the top of the omnibus. His was a tough nature physically, as well as morally, and if he had found himself inside an omnibus he would have thought he was going to die. The sun was down. A green

hue rose from the horizon half-way to the zenith, but a pale yellow lingered over the vanished sun, like the gold at the bottom of a chrysolite. The stars were twinkling small and sharp in the azure overhead. A cold wind blew in little gusts, now from this side, now from that, as they went steadily along. The horses' hoofs rang loud on the hard road. The night got hold of him: it was at this season, and on nights like these, that he had haunted the house of Lucy's father, doing his best to persuade her to make him, as he said, a happy man. It now seemed as if then, and then only, he had been a happy man. Certainly, of all his life, it was the time when he came nearest to having a peep out of the upper windows of the house of life. He had been a dweller in the lower regions, a hewer of wood to the god of the cellar; and after his marriage, he had gone straight down again to the temple of the earthy god—to a

worship whose god and temple and treasure caves will one day drop suddenly from under the votary's feet, and leave him dangling in the air without even a pocket about him—without even his banker's book to show for his respectability.

The night, I say, recalled the lovely season of his courtship, and again, in the mirror of loss, he caught a glimpse of things beyond him. Ah, if only that time and its hopes had remained with him! How different things would have been now! If Lucy had proved what he thought her!—remained what she seemed—the gentle, complaisant, yielding lady he imagined her, promising him a life of bliss! Alas, she would not even keep account of five pounds a week to please him! He never thought whether he, on his part, might not have, in some measure, come short of her expectations in a husband; whether she, the more lovely in inward design and outward fashion, might

not have indulged yet more exquisite dreams of bliss which, by devotion to his ideal of life, he had done his part in disappointing. He only thought what a foolishness it all was; that thus it would go on to the end of the book; that youth after youth would have his turn of such a wooing, and such a disappointment. Sunsets, indeed! The suns of man's happiness never did anything but set! Out of money even—and who could say there was any poetry in that?—there was not half the satisfaction to be got that one expected. It was all a mess of expectations and disappointments mashed up together—nothing more. That was the world—on a fair judgment.

Such were his reflections till the driver pulled up for him to get down at his own gate. As he got down the said driver glanced up curiously at the row of windows on the first floor, and as soon as Mr. Dempster's back was turned, pointed to them with

the butt-end of his whip, and nodded queerly to the gentleman who sat on his other side.

"That's more'n I've seen this six weeks," he said. "There's something more'n common up this evenin', sir."

There was light in the drawing-room—that was all the wonder; but at those windows Mr. Dempster himself looked so fixedly that he had nearly stumbled up his own door-steps.

He carried a latch-key now, for he did not care to stand at the door till the boy answered the bell; people's eyes, as they passed, seemed to burn holes in the back of his coat.

He opened the street door quietly, and went straight up the stair to the drawing-room. Perhaps he thought to detect some liberty taken by his servants. He was a little earlier than usual. He opened that door, took two steps into the room, and stood arrested, motionless. With his shabby hat on his

head, his shabby greatcoat on his back—for he grudged every penny spent on his clothes —his arms hanging down by his sides, and his knees bent, ready to tremble, he looked not a little out of keeping in the soft-lighted, dainty, delicate-hued drawing-room. Could he believe his eyes? The light of a large lamp was centred upon a gracious figure in white—his wife, just as he used to see her before he married her! That was the way her hair would break loose as she ran down the stair to meet him!—only then there was no baby in her lap for it to fall over like a torrent of unlighted water over a white stone! It was a lovely sight.

He had stood but a moment when she looked up and saw him. She started, but gave no cry louder than a little moan. Instantly she rose. Turning, she laid the baby on the sofa, and flitted to him like a wraith. Arrived where he stood yet motionless, she fell upon her knees and cla-

his. He was far too bewildered now to ask himself what husbands did in such circumstances, and stood like a block.

"Husband! husband!" she cried, "forgive me." With one hand she hid her face, although it was bent to the ground, and with the other held up to him a bit of paper. He took it from the thin white fingers; it might explain something—help him out of this bewilderment, half nightmare, half heavenly vision. He opened it. Nothing but a hundred-pound note! The familiar sight of bank paper, however, seemed to restore his speech.

"What does this mean, Lucy? Upon my word! Permit me to say——"

He was growing angry.

"It is to pay the butcher," she said, with a faltering voice.

"Damn the butcher!" he cried. "I hope you've got something else to say to me! Where have you been all this time?"

"At my mother's. I've had a brain fever, and been out of my mind. It was all about the butcher's bill."

Dempster stared. Perhaps he could not understand how a woman who would not keep accounts should be to such a degree troubled at the result of her neglect.

"Look at me, if you don't believe me," she cried, and as she spoke she rose and lifted her face to his.

He gazed at it for a moment—pale, thin, and worn; and out of it shone the beautiful eyes, larger than before, but shimmering uncertain like the stars of a humid night, although they looked straight into his.

Something queer was suddenly the matter with his throat—something he had never felt before—a constriction such as, had he been superstitious, he might have taken for the prologue to a rope. Then the thought came—what a brute he must be that his wife should have been afraid to tell him

her trouble! Thereupon he tried to speak, but his throat was irresponsive to his will. Eve's apple kept sliding up and down in it, and would not let the words out. He had never been so served by members of his own body in his life before! It was positive rebellion, and would get him into trouble with his wife. There it was! Didn't he say so?

"Can't you forgive me, Mr. Dempster?" she said, and the voice was so sweet and so sad! "It is my own money. Aunt Lucy is dead, and left it me. I think it will be enough to pay all my debts; and I promise you—I do promise you that I will set down every halfpenny after this. Do try me once again—for baby's sake."

This last was a sudden thought. She turned and ran to the sofa. Dempster stood where he was, fighting the strange uncomfortable feeling in his throat. It would not yield a jot. Was he going to die suddenly

of choking? Was it a judgment upon him? Diphtheria, perhaps! It was much about in the City!

She was back, and holding up to him their sleeping child.

The poor fellow was not half the brute he looked—only he could *not* tell what to do with that confounded lump in his throat! He dared not try to speak, for it only choked him the more. He put his arms round them both, and pressed them to his bosom. Then the lump in his throat melted and ran out at his eyes, and all doubt vanished like a mist before the sun. But he never knew that he had wept. His wife did, and that was enough.

The next morning, for the first time in his life, he lost the eight o'clock omnibus.

The following Monday morning she brought her week's account to him. He turned from it testily, but she insisted on his going over it. There was not the mis-

take of a halfpenny. He went to town with a smile in his heart, and that night brought her home a cheque for ten pounds instead of five.

One day, in the middle of the same week, he came upon her sitting over the little blue-and-red-ruled book with a troubled countenance. She took no notice of his entrance.

"Do leave those accounts," he said, "and attend to me."

She shook her head impatiently, and made him no other answer. One moment more, however, and she started up, threw her arms about his neck, and cried triumphantly,

"It's buttons!—fourpence-halfpenny I paid for buttons!"

END OF VOL. I.

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